John Williams

THOUGHTS

ON

THE NOVELTY,

THE EXCELLENCE,

AND

THE EVIDENCE,

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

BY

JOHN SIMPSON.

BATH,
PRINTED BY R. CRUTTWELL;
AND SOLD BY
J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

M DCC XCVIII.

THOUGHTS, &c.

THE love of novelty prevails in every age and nation. It is natural to man. To ſuch a degree does it poſſeſs ſome minds, that they are with difficulty perſuaded, that there could have been originally any thing new in what has been long familiar to them. With reſpect to the religion we profeſs, it is, at this day, aſked, what is there new in it? To this queſtion we may reply, that it contains many diſtinguiſhing characters which are original excellencies, of the higheſt importance to the preſent and future happineſs of man, and ſuch as clearly evince its author to be divine.

In the following eſſay we ſhall endeavour to develope ſome of the principal of theſe uſeful novelties.

For this purpoſe let us imagine ourſelves to have been living when Chriſt and his Apoſtles appeared in the world, and ſuppoſe the moral and religious ſtate of the Jews and Heathens to have been as it then was. In theſe circumſtances may we not truly

ſay, that we ſhould have found the religion of Jeſus *new* and *excellent* in its *principle*, in the degree of its *purity* and *extent*, in its *exemplification*, in the ſtrength of its *motives*, in its *evidence*, in the manner of its *publication*, in the rapidity and extent of its *progreſs*, and in its *effects* on the religion, lives, and manners of men?

Religion and morals are taught by Chriſt as founded upon one plain fact; and the evidence of his divine authority, and the chief motive to obſerve his precepts, are founded upon another fact.

1ſt. The religion of Jeſus is novel and tranſcendent in its *principle*. There is a new object of *faith* in the goſpel, and a new *baſis* of religion and morals.

Jeſus, as the Meſſiah of God, is the new object of *faith*. "He that cometh to God muſt believe "that he is, and that he is the rewarder of all thoſe "who diligently ſeek him." He that cometh to Chriſt alſo muſt believe, "that the Father hath ſent "him." "Ye believe in God," ſays Jeſus to his diſciples, "believe alſo in me." Again, in his addreſs to his heavenly Father, he ſays, "This is life "eternal, that they might know thee the only true "God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent."

There is, moreover, a ſtriking and ſublime novelty reſpecting this new object of our faith. Though the Jews expected a ſplendid temporal prince in the perſon of their Meſſiah, yet the Evangeliſts have repreſented him as born of parents in a low ſituation;

tion; having no wealthy, renowned, or powerful aſſociates; being without any natural means of aggrandizing himſelf or his nation; the object of reproach to the rulers, the opulent, the learned, and all whom they could influence; and cloſing his life in the moſt painful and ignominious manner as a malefactor upon a croſs. This deſpiſed perſon in his ſtate of hnmiliation publicly declares, even to his enemies, "The hour is coming in which all that are "in the graves ſhall hear the voice of the Son of "God, and ſhall come forth; they that have done "good unto a reſurrection of life, and they that have "done evil unto a reſurrection of puniſhment." And to his friends, Martha and his diſciples, he ſays, "I am the reſurrection and the life; he that believeth "in me, though he were dead, yet ſhall he live." Again, when he was ſummoned before the high prieſt, who adjured him to ſay whether or no he were the Meſſiah of God, with unprecedented magnanimity he replies, "Ye ſay truly that I am, and "hereafter ſhall ye ſee the Son of man ſitting on the "right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of "heaven."

Is it not incredible that theſe apparently inconſiſtent ideas of their Meſſiah, could have been entertained by any mere Jew? They were, to every Jew, a ſtumbling-block that lay at the very threſhold of Chriſtianity. Could theſe ideas, more eſpecially, have been formed by illiterate Jewiſh fiſhermen? Or, if

invented,

invented, could any natural means have gained them a favourable reception in Judea? In the gentile world, not even the notion of any man ſuſtaining ſo exalted a character, or being the means of conferring ſuch extenſive benefits upon mankind at large, was ever entertained. A proclaimer of the glad tidings of immortality to all the inhabitants of the earth, and a reſtorer of life to all the dead at the final conſummation, are characters in which no one ever appeared before him who is eminently ſtiled, "the "light of the world," and, "the prince of peace." With what meekneſs, dignity, and grace, with what wonderful diſplays of wiſdom and power, did he ſupport his exalted claims!

If the Evangeliſts copied the character which they have delineated from a living original, this eaſily explains how they could have formed the idea of it, and have conveyed it to us. But, if no ſuch ~~character~~ original exiſted, we have narratives in our hands, well atteſted to have been written by perſons totally unequal to the taſk even of conceiving the ſubject of them, much leſs of drawing up the detail of actions, diſcourſes, and events, that are neceſſary to ſuſtain the character with propriety.

Further; *religion* and *morals* are taught by Chriſt upon an entirely *new ground.* The whole doctrine of true religion, and the whole ſyſtem of moral duty, reſpecting God, our fellow-creatures, and ourſelves, is inculcated in the goſpel, as founded upon one plain

ſimple

ſimple fact, eaſily comprehenſible by thoſe of the loweſt capacity, and abundantly evident to enlightened reaſon, namely, that God is our *father*, the *father* of *all mankind*.

We are to ſhew, then, that no other perſon before the Chriſtian æra ever taught religion and morality upon the ſame principle, and that Jeſus did teach it upon this ground. It will be uſeful, alſo, to attend to the particular advantages of making this fact the baſis of all piety and virtue.

I am aware that it may be ſaid, the Apoſtle Paul acknowledges that ſome of the Grecian poets aſſerted, "we are the offspring of God." And we may add, that others of the moſt eminent Latin poets ſpeak of Jupiter as the father of Gods and men, and the father almighty. But to this Jupiter they aſſigned parents, and even a grandfather and grandmother. And they repreſented him as committing crimes of a heinous nature. Heathen deities, in general, were patrons of vice. Their prieſts were not teachers of morality. Their idolatrous worſhip had no connection with the practice of virtue. The ideas which they entertained, either of their inferior gods, or of their chief god as a father, could never be applied as the baſis of true piety and moral goodneſs. Many of their religious rites were ſo cruel, vicious, and impure, that no ſon could ever have thought of appeaſing a father's anger, or gaining his favor, by them. They could not, therefore, have derived their

origin

origin from the view of their Supreme God as their parent. Their arguments for virtue were taken principally from the beauty and excellency of it as wiſe, fit, and agreeable to nature, and from the baſeneſs, deformity, and turpitude of vice. Heathen writers, on the ſubject of morals, did not themſelves derive their obligation to the practice of virtue from the relation in which they ſtood to their gods.

In the account which Du Halde has given of the ancient Chineſe religion, that was revived by Confucius, he ſays, that the object of public worſhip is, the ſovereign of all things, the principle of all things, the father of the people, &c. This parental relation ſeems evidently to have been limited, in their idea, to that particular empire. For Du Halde obſerves, that, " from the foundation of the empire, " by Fo-hi, the Supreme Being was commonly " known by the name of *Chang-ti*, and *Tien*, who " was the object of public worſhip, and, as it were, " the ſoul, and primum mobile, of the government " of the nation." This view of the object of public worſhip accords with the account he gives of their books of morals. He ſays, " The canonical or claſ- " ſical books of the Chineſe, which they regard as " the ſource of their learning and morality, are not " treatiſes of religion purpoſely made with a deſign " to inſtruct the people. The drift of them was, to " maintain peace and tranquillity in the ſtate, by a " regulation of manners, and an exact obſervation

" of

" of the laws; for the attainment of which, the an-
" cient Chineſe judged two things neceſſary to be ob-
" ſerved, viz. the duties of religion, and the rules of
" good government." The Emperors themſelves united three different offices in their own perſons, that of teacher of the ancient doctrine, that of prieſt to perform the public rites to *Tien*, and that of civil governor. " Their politics," he ſays, " conſiſted in
" the obſervation of regularity, and purity of man-
" ners. They reduced them to this ſimple maxim,
" viz. that thoſe who command, ſhould imitate the
" conduct of *Tien*, in treating their inferiors as their
" children; and thoſe who obey, ought to look upon
" their ſuperiors as their fathers." Again, " the
" ſect of the learned, who follow the doctrine of the
" ancient books, and look upon Confucius as their
" maſter, profeſs only to be regular ſtudents, in
" order to advance themſelves to the degrees and
" dignities of the empire, on account of merit,
" wit, and learning, proper for the conduct of life,
" and the government of the empire." The religion and morals of Confucius appear to have been a ſyſtem of the moſt highly refined policy, extended even to the thoughts. It is therefore natural to conclude, that the idea of the parental relation of the Supreme Being was ſuggeſted for the ſame limited purpoſe. It was, however, greatly polluted by idolatrous doctrines and ceremonies, and ſome ſentiments that were inconſiſtent with the idea of God as a univerſal parent.

If

If we look into the accounts which are given us of the divine diſpenſations in the Old Teſtament, we ſhall find that the appellations which are employed to deſcribe the Supreme Being, when he is repreſented as ſpeaking to Adam and Noah, are terms that expreſs his power and eternity. God himſelf ſays to Moſes, "I appeared unto Abraham, Iſaac, "and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but "by my name Jehovah was I not known to them. "Therefore ſay ye unto the ſons of Iſrael, I am "Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under "the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will take you "to me for a people, and ye ſhall know that I am "Jehovah your God." At the delivery of the ſecond tables of the law, Jehovah proclaimed himſelf, "abundant in goodneſs, merciful, and forgiving "iniquity." The very numerous, burdenſome, and expenſive rites, however, which the Jews were required to obſerve, would naturally excite leſs of filial affection than of awe, which was an emotion more ſuited, in the circumſtances in which they were, to draw them off from heathen idolatry and ſuperſtition.

In after ages, when their minds were better prepared for more enlarged ſentiments, we find in the Old Teſtament, ſome admirable deſcriptions of the univerſal goodneſs and mercy of the Moſt High. But the general *characters* under which deity is repreſented by Jewiſh ſages and prophets, are thoſe of juſtice, power, and eternity, of which laſt attribute the

the appropriate name of the Supreme Being amongſt the Jews, the term Jehovah, was particularly expreſſive. Again, the uſual *relations* which God is repreſented in the Old Teſtament as bearing towards his creatures, are thoſe of the Creator and Governor of all things. And ſublime ideas are there conveyed of Deity, "who made the earth by "his power, and ſtretched out the heavens by his "wiſdom; who killeth and who maketh alive, who "bringeth low and lifteth up; who ruleth in the "kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomſo-"ever he will." So little, however, was the idea of God as a *parent* inculcated under the Moſaic diſpenſation, that, throughout all the books of the Old Teſtament, I have found only 25 inſtances in which he is ſpoken of as a *father*, even to the children of Iſrael, and only 28 others in which they are ſtiled his children. Some of theſe inſtances expreſs theſe relations between God and ſingle perſons only, but none of them extend it further than to the Jews. Nor do I know of any text in the Old Teſtament in which God is called the *father* of mankind *in general*. Moſes, inſtead of founding his religion upon the idea of God being a *father*, at the firſt ſolemn publication of it, relates the deſcription which Jehovah gives of himſelf as the *only God*, and poſſeſſing the attributes of power, mercy, and goodneſs, without mentioning his *parental* relation. And, when Jeſus called Jehovah his *father*, the Jews thought it blaſphemy,

blaſphemy, and were going to take up ſtones to ſtone him to death; which was a full proof, not only that they were unaccuſtomed to contemplate Jehovah as ſtanding in this relation to them, but alſo that they conſidered it as a daring preſumption in any one to do it.

It appears, then, that neither by the ancient Heathens, nor by the wiſe men, or divinely empowered inſtructors of the Jews, were the doctrine and practice of religion and morals taught, as founded upon this fact, that Deity is the *univerſal father*.

But, "when the fullneſs of time was come, God "ſent forth his ſon," more fully and plainly to ſhew us, not only that there is but one God the maker of heaven and earth, which had been already proved, for a ſeries of ages, in the moſt convincing manner, to the Jews, but that this God is the *father* of *all men*, and condeſcends to manifeſt himſelf by his peculiar meſſenger and Meſſiah, as ſtanding in this endearing relation to the whole human race, to "Jews "and Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians, bond and free," without reſpect of perſons. This language concerning the Deity, which is uſed by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, is entirely new, conſidered as an habitual language, and is intended, of courſe, to impreſs on the minds of men a ſentiment which they never ſufficiently attended to before, and to make it a baſis of their conduct towards God, and their fellow-creatures.

In

In conveying this ſentiment, that God is the father of all mankind, it may be obſerved that Jeſus uſes the phraſes, "the Father, my Father, your Father, our Father," and other ſimilar ones, promiſcuouſly, in the very ſame ſenſe, meaning the *univerſal father*. This is fully aſcertained by what he himſelf, and the apoſtle, have explicitly declared. For Chriſt ſays to Mary, after his reſurrection, "Go "to my brethren, and ſay unto them, I aſcend unto "my Father, and your *Father*, and to my God, and "your God." And the Apoſtle Paul ſays to the Epheſians, "I bow my knees unto the *Father* of our "Lord Jeſus Chriſt, of whom the whole family in "heaven and earth is named." The Jews, as we have ſhewn, underſtood Jeſus as meaning the Supreme Being, by the perſon whom he ſtiled his Father. And his diſciples, towards the cloſe of his miniſtry, had the ſame idea. For when he ſaid that "he ſhould leave the world and go to the *Father*," they anſwered, "by this we believe that thou comeſt "forth from God."

A curſory view of the inſtructions of Jeſus, will ſerve to ſhew us, that he was habitually ſolicitous to impreſs upon the minds of his hearers, an idea of this relation between God and all mankind, as the baſis of piety and virtue, and of our hopes of future happineſs.

At the entrance upon his miniſtry, in his ſermon on the Mount, which was deſigned to explain particularly

tieularly the true nature of his religion, and wherein it tranſcended in excellence what had been taught before, he took frequent opportunities of enforcing a regard to God and our duty, from this very idea. Towards the beginning of it, he urges the practice of univerſal piety and goodneſs upon his diſciples, from this motive, " that it will glorify their *father* " in heaven." And afterwards he enforces love to all mankind, and even to our enemies, from the example of our heavenly *father*. From a regard to the reward which our heavenly *father* will beſtow on thoſe who are truly ſincere in the practice of duty, every degree of oſtentation, in giving alms, in prayer, and in faſting, is diſcouraged. The forgiveneſs of the treſpaſſes of our fellow-creatures againſt us, is enforced from the placability of our heavenly *father*. And it is worthy of our particular obſervation, that the prayer which Chriſt gives as a model for this part of duty, begins with, " *our father* who " art in heaven." He moreover directs his diſciples to pray to their *father*. Truſt in God is alſo recommended by Jeſus, from the tender concern of our heavenly *father*, whoſe providence extends to the fowls of the air, and lillies of the field, and who, therefore, cannot be ſuppoſed to neglect his rational offspring. Again, from the willingneſs of our heavenly *father* to give what is proper, to thoſe who ſincerely pray unto him, our duty to do that to another, which we might reaſonably expect another to

do

do to us, is enjoined as a plain conſequence. Theſe inſtances occur in the firſt public addreſs which our Lord delivered to the people, and to his diſciples.

He reproved the buyers and ſellers whom he drove out of the temple, by ſaying, "Make not my *father*'s "houſe a houſe of merchandiſe." In his converſation with the woman of Samaria, when he was characterizing Chriſtian public worſhip, as diſtinguiſhed from that of the Jews and Samaritans, he ſays, "The "hour cometh, and now is, when the true worſhip-"pers ſhall worſhip the *father* in ſpirit and in truth, "for the *father* ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him." He gave a pattern alſo of praying to the *father* in his own devotions, for he always introduced his prayers with the mention of Deity under this amiable character. The ſhort ejaculation, "My God, my God, why "haſt thou forſaken me?" uttered in his extreme agony on the croſs, is the only exception.

The beautiful parable of the prodigal deſerves our particular notice, as conveying the idea of the parental compaſſion and forgiveneſs of our heavenly *father*, in the moſt engaging and impreſſive manner. And from the ſimile of the ſingle loſt ſheep out of a hundred, Jeſus makes this concluſion, "Even ſo it is "not the will of your heavenly *father*, that one of "theſe little ones ſhould periſh."

Chriſt aſſures us, that it is "the *father* who raiſeth "up the dead, and quickeneth them;" and that "the ſon of man ſhall come in the glory of his *fa-*

"*ther*,

" *ther*, to reward every man according to his works." Again, in the day when we ſhall be called before his bar, he will ſay to the righteous, " Come, ye bleſſed " of my *father*," &c. And the future happy ſtate of the righteous, he calls " the kingdom of their " *father*." When he ſpeaks of his divine commiſſion, he ſays, " I am come in my *father*'s name; the " *father* himſelf, who hath ſent me, hath born wit- " neſs of me; the ſon can do nothing of himſelf, " but what he ſeeth the *father* do; the works that " I do in my *father*'s name, they bear witneſs of me; " as the *father* hath taught me, I ſpeak theſe things."

Further, to ſhew of how much importance he conſidered an attention to this common relation of God to us, when he was told, " that his mother and bre- " thren deſired to ſpeak to him," he ſaid, " Who- " ſoever ſhall do the will of my *father* in heaven, " the ſame is my brother, and ſiſter, and mother." He ſays alſo, " Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before " men, him will I confeſs alſo before my *father* who " is in heaven; and whoſoever ſhall deny me before " men, him will I alſo deny before my *father* who " is in heaven."

When he ſent forth his twelve diſciples to preach to the Jews, he told them, " When ye are delivered " up, take no thought what ye ſhall ſpeak, for the " ſpirit of your *father* ſhall ſpeak in you." On another occaſion he aſſures his apoſtles, " Whatſo- " ever two of you ſhall aſk, it ſhall be done for them

" of

" of my *father* in heaven." When he is diſcouraging phariſaical ſuperſtition, he ſays, " Every " plant which my heavenly *father* hath not planted " ſhall be rooted up." When Peter acknowledged him to be the Meſſiah of God, Jeſus ſaid, " Fleſh and " blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my *fa*- " *ther* who is in heaven." Even in that figurative diſcourſe of Chriſt, after feeding 5000 perſons in a miraculous manner, whatever obſcurity there may be in ſome parts of it, the idea of God as the *father* is plainly expreſſed in eleven different inſtances. When, afterwards, he called himſelf, " The light of " the world," and appealed to the witneſs which the *father* bare to him, and they underſtood not that he ſpake to them of God the father, he tells them that, " When they have crucified him, they ſhall know " that he is the Meſſiah, whom the *father* hath ſent;" upon which many underſtood and believed. As he continued addreſſing them, he ſeveral times introduced the idea of the parental relation of Deity to us. And in another converſation, ſoon after this, he makes frequent mention of God as the *father*.

Before he raiſed Lazarus from the dead, he gave public " thanks to the *father*, in the preſence of the " people, for enabling him to do it, that they might " believe." When he ſpeaks to his diſciples of his approaching death, he repeats the mention of the relation which God ſuſtained as his *father*. In an addreſs to the people, ſoon afterwards, he aſſures

his hearers, that he received his commiſſion from the *father*. We are further told by John, that, "Be-
"fore the paſſover, Jeſus, knowing that he ſhould
"depart unto the *father*, and that the *father* had
"given all things into his hands," he inſtructs his diſciples in the virtue of humility, by condeſcending to employ the ſymbolical action of waſhing their feet.

As the time of his ſufferings approached, he dwelt with more pathos and emphaſis on the idea of God as a *father*. At the inſtitution of the ſupper, he tells his diſciples, "I will not drink henceforth of
"this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink
"it new with you in my *father*'s kingdom." Again, in the affectionate farewell diſcourſe to his diſciples, and the prayer which he uttered before them, feeling himſelf the greateſt ſatisfaction and comfort from the view of God as his *father*, and wiſhing to leave the deepeſt ſenſe of this relation of Deity to his creatures upon the minds of his diſciples, to increaſe their conſolation, to encourage their hope and confidence, and to fit them for teaching others, and for behaving themſelves in a manner ſuitable to the character of his apoſtles, he dwells on the idea ſo much, that upon this occaſion only he ſpeaks of God as a *father* no leſs than 50 times.

In his agony in the garden, immediately after, he thrice expreſſes his fear, and his reſignation, to his *father*. Upon the croſs he prayed for his enemies, "*father*, forgive them." And the laſt words he uttered before

before his death were, " *Father*, into thy hands I " commit my ſpirit." The morning after his reſurrection he ſays to Mary, " Go to my brethren, and ſay " unto them, I aſcend unto my *father* and your *fa-* " *ther*, and to my God and your God." When he appeared to all the apoſtles, he told them, " Behold, " I ſend the promiſe of my *father* upon you." And to all the apoſtles, excepting Thomas, who was abſent, he ſays, " As my *father* hath ſent me, even ſo " ſend I you." At another time, being with the apoſtles at Jeruſalem, he commanded them, " to " wait there for the promiſe of the *father*." Even his laſt direction to them, juſt before he aſcended into heaven, was, " Go and teach all nations, bap- " tizing them in the name of the *Father*, of the Son, " and of the Holy Spirit." This form of initiation into the Chriſtian church, was probably intended to impreſs upon the mind this ſentiment, that the idea of God, as ſtanding in the relation of a *father* to his creatures, was a characteriſtic principle of the religion of Jeſus.

This principle his apoſtles imbibed, and taught the world. The very firſt time that they publicly preached the goſpel after the aſcenſion of Chriſt, on the day of pentecoſt, Peter began with addreſſing the Jews by quotations from their prophets, and ſhewing their fulfilment in Jeſus. He then opened his divine commiſſion, by ſaying, that " Chriſt, being " raiſed, and exalted to the right hand of God, re-

" ceived of the *father* the promiſe of the holy ſpirit,
" which he had ſhed forth upon his apoſtles." Again, when Paul preached at Athens, he quoted an incidental expreſſion of one of their poets, which they never applied to their religion and morals, on purpoſe to lay the baſis of his inſtructions upon a ſimilar idea: " Foraſmuch, then, as we are the off-
" ſpring of God, we ſhould worſhip him as a ſpi-
" ritual being, in the practice of virtue, and with
" a regard to that future righteous judgment by
" Chriſt, of which he has aſſured all men, by raiſing
" him from the dead."

Of ſuch high importance did the apoſtles eſteem it to impreſs the idea of God as our *father* upon the minds of all to whom they preached the goſpel, that even in the very introduction to every one of their uncontroverted epiſtles, to Chriſtians in general, to particular churches, or to ſingle perſons, Deity is repreſented under this amiable character; and, in ſeveral of them this is repeated before they proceed with the letter.

The Apoſtle Paul, when teaching the unity of God to the heathen idolaters at Corinth, ſays, " To
" us there is but one God the *father*, of whom are
" all things, and we in him." The ſame alſo to the Epheſians, " There is one God and *father* of all,
" who is above all, and through all, and in you all." When Peter ſpeaks of the preſcience of God, he mentions it as " The fore-knowledge of God the
" *father*."

" *father.*" Paul ſtiles God, " The *father* of our " Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the *father* of mercies, and God " of all comfort." When James ſpeaks of the goodneſs of God, he ſays, " Every good gift, and " every perfect gift, cometh down from the *father* " of lights."

When the apoſtles mention the bleſſings of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, and the proof of a future life, they appear animated with the idea, that they originate from our heavenly *father.* " Behold," ſays John, " what manner of love the *father* hath be- " ſtowed upon us, that we ſhould be called the ſons " of God." " Let every tongue," ſays the apoſtle Paul, " confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the " glory of God the *father.*" With his uſual warmth he breaks out to the Epheſians, " Bleſſed be the God " and *father* of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath " bleſſed us with all ſpiritual bleſſings in heavenly " things in Chriſt, having predeſtinated us to the " adoption of children, by Jeſus Chriſt to himſelf: " Having made known unto us the myſtery of his " will, according to his good pleaſure, which he hath " purpoſed in himſelf, that, in the diſpenſation of " the fulneſs of times, he might gather together in " one all things in Chriſt, both which are in heaven " and which are on earth, even in him, in whom alſo " we have obtained an inheritance." In like manner, Peter is very animated in his expreſſion of the ſame idea. " Bleſſed be the God and *father* of our Lord " Jeſus

" Jeſus Chriſt, who, according to his abundant mer-
" cy, hath regenerated us to a lively hope, by the
" reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, to an
" inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fa-
" deth not away, reſerved for you who are kept by
" the power of God through faith unto ſalvation."
And as it is from the *father* that the goſpel diſpenſa-
tion originated, and by him is conducted and car-
ried on, ſo, when this great plan of divine providence
ſhall be finiſhed and completed, then, the Apoſtle
Paul tells us, " ſhall Chriſt deliver up the kingdom
" to God, even the *father*."

To the *father*, therefore, the apoſtles themſelves
offer their thankſgivings and prayers, and direct
their followers to do the ſame. " Through Chriſt,"
ſays Paul, " both Jews and Gentiles have acceſs by
" one ſpirit unto the *father*. And, becauſe ye are
" ſons, God hath ſent forth the ſpirit of his ſon
" into your hearts, crying, Abba, *father*." " And
" truly," ſays John, " our fellowſhip is with the
" *father*, and with his ſon Jeſus Chriſt." " With
" one mind and one mouth," ſays Paul to the Ro-
" mans, " glorify God, even the *father* of our
" Lord Jeſus Chriſt." To the Coloſſians, alſo,
" Whatſoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the
" name of the Lord Jeſus, giving thanks to God
" and the *father* by him." Again, to the Epheſians,
" Give thanks, always, for all things, unto God and
" the *father*, in the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt."

The

The apoſtles alſo, in imitation of their maſter, habitually inculcate the idea of the parental relation of Deity to all his creatures, as the baſis of true religion and virtue. "Be followers of God as dear "children," ſays Paul to the Epheſians. "Pure "religion and undefiled before God and the *father*," ſays James, "is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and wi- "dows in their affliction, and to keep himſelf un- "ſpotted from the world." And John ſays, "If "any man love the world, the love of the *father* is "not in him." "As Chriſt was raiſed up from the "dead by the glory of the *father*," ſays Paul to the Romans, "even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in newneſs "of life." And to the Theſſalonians he ſays, "The Lord make you to abound in love towards "all men, that he may eſtabliſh your hearts un- "blameable in holineſs before God, even the *father*, "at the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." "As "obedient children," ſays Peter, in his firſt general epiſtle, "be holy in all manner of converſation; "becauſe it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. "And if ye call on the *father*, who without reſpect "of perſons judgeth according to every man's work, "paſs the time of your ſojourning here in fear."

Of all the Evangeliſts no one has preſerved ſo many pointed inſtructions of this ſort, as John, the beloved diſciple of Jeſus, whoſe caſt of mind appeared ſo ſimilar to that of his maſter, and who would more eaſily remember ſentiments moſt correſpondent

ſpondent to his own diſpoſition. And, as it is likely that he wrote his goſpel to ſupply what the other Evangeliſts had omitted, he ſeems to have taken particular care to note down thoſe converſations and diſcourſes which abound with the idea of God as a *father*. In his firſt epiſtle, alſo, he has ſeveral times expreſsly mentioned this relation itſelf, and throughout the whole of it dwells upon ideas ſuggeſted by it, namely, love to God, and love to men as the children of God.

Surely no one who reads the New Teſtament with care, can doubt that it was a principal object of Chriſt and his apoſtles, to impreſs the idea of God, as the *father of all creatures*, very ſtrongly on the mind, as the principle of all piety and goodneſs. And no other perſon, before Jeſus, ever founded religion and virtue in general upon this relation of God to *all mankind*.

Power was the diſtinguiſhing attribute of the ſupreme imaginary Deity of the heathen world. *Eternity* was the appropriate character of the God of the Jews. But Jeſus has taught us to approach the almighty and everlaſting creator of all things as *our common father*.

Let us attend, then, to the advantages of this new baſis of piety and virtue, that the ſupreme, almighty, and all-wiſe God, is the affectionate *father of all* beings. It is of peculiar uſe, that what is of the greateſt conſequence to us ſhould have its foundation in a

fact.

fact. For facts are more eaſily comprehended by perſons of all capacities, than mere propoſitions or abſtract ideas. The proper force and influence of a diſtinct particular fact upon the heart and life, is alſo more eaſily perceived, and more ſtrongly felt, than that of a general precept or rule. Now this particular fact that God is the *univerſal father*, is perhaps more eaſily underſtood, and affects the mind more deeply, than any other. The character of a *father* is one of thoſe characters which make the moſt early, the moſt diſtinct, and the moſt indelible impreſſions on the human heart. Concerning this, perſons of all capacities form the cleareſt ideas; and from this, they reaſon with the greateſt accuracy. Of what unſpeakable importance, then, muſt it be, to be taught to apply ſuch an idea to our whole duty, and that by fairly recurring to a fact which expreſſes it in the ſtrongeſt manner, we may form the beſt ſentiments of God, of religion, and univerſal virtue, and at the ſame time feel the ſtrongeſt motive to the practice of them! Let us conſider this in a few inſtances.

By contemplating Deity as the univerſal *father*, we form the beſt and trueſt notions of his *attributes* and *providence*. The almighty power of the Supreme Being is thus viewed, not as a tyrannical deſpotic force, but as the irreſiſtible power of one who tenderly careth for us, and who will employ it for our benefit. His wiſdom is conſidered as the ſkill

and

and knowledge of a *parent* ever willing to teach and direct us, if we humbly ask his guidance and instruction. His goodness is the more endearing to us because we are his *children*. We rejoice in all the works of God as the operations of our heavenly *father*. We feel ourselves interested in his government, and satisfied with all his proceedings, from the firm confidence which we have that the result of all things shall be happy to his obedient *offspring*. The whole face of nature and of providence is brightened and illuminated by the consideration, that he who made and guides the universe condescends to stile himself the *father of us all*.

The full force of the idea that God is our *father*, language cannot express. If we conceive of a being of infinite perfection, to whom we and all creatures are indebted for existence and every good, we admire, revere, and stand in awe of him, and we are thankful for his benefits. But when we view such a being as a *parent*, and he condescends to stile himself our *father*, what a combination of the most pleasing emotions of the mind are concentred in this single endearing idea. Our sublimest conceptions have an object that infinitely exceeds their utmost grasp. Our warmest gratitude views with lively sentiment the parent in the benefactor whose favors we can never repay. Our filial love, admiration, and reverence, are excited, when we reflect that we are the *offspring* of the Most High, and we feel that

in

in him we have the firmeſt baſis of confidence and joy. And without reſerve we obey the commands, and reſign ourſelves to the appointments, of a being who cannot but befriend us, becauſe he is our *father*.

Again, by thus viewing the perfections of Deity as the attributes of our *father*, the very ſource of enthuſiaſm, ſuperſtition, and hypocriſy, is deſtroyed. It is the beſt preventative of the little fears and ſcruples that haunt the timid mind, and it precludes that diſpiriting dread and horror of the deſpotic power of the Moſt High, which diſcourages every ingenuous approach to him, and drives men to expreſs their homage by external ſuperſtitious ſubſtitutes for the religion of the heart, which they deſpair of ever attaining to a degree that will be accepted by him, whom they figure to themſelves as the ſtern and rigid monarch of the univerſe. He who rightly conſiders the Supreme Being as the *father of all*, can never think that mere formal outward ceremonies will, before him, ſtand in the ſtead of inward purity and active virtue; becauſe no one entertains the idea that a *father* is ſatisfied with an external action, performed to ſcreen the depravity of the heart. Nor can the fervors of enthuſiaſm ever prevail in the breaſt of any one who maintains thoſe reverential ſentiments of the all-perfect God, which the contemplation of him as our *father* neceſſarily inſpires.

The fact that God is the *father of mankind in general*, is alſo the firmeſt and the broadeſt baſis of all moral

moral obligation. When we contemplate Deity in the parental relation which he bears to all creatures, he appears as the common centre of union between every ſingle creature of the human race, and every other individual, each being equally his offſpring.

This principle eſtabliſhes an inſeparable connection between the duties which we owe to God, to our fellow-creatures, and to ourſelves. And from this origin all the obligations of piety and virtue are more naturally and eaſily deducible than from any other. Jeſus, therefore, mentions love to God as the firſt and great commandment, and love to our fellow-creatures as the ſecond, and like unto it. For God being our *father*, our firſt love is due to him; and mankind in general being equally his children, are our brethren, and of courſe entitled to the ſecond place in our affections. Nothing could poſſibly ſhew more clearly, or with greater force, the obligations we are under to the moſt tender, diſintereſted, and univerſal charity and benevolence, than the fact that God is the common *father of all*.

The conſideration that God is our *father*, is the beſt baſis of morals in another view. It renders a particular enumeration of duties unneceſſary. It refers all moral obligations to their natural ſource, and limits or enlarges them in a manner and degree ſuitable to the infinite variety of circumſtances from which they ſpring. Mankind are fond of knowing the preciſe limit and extent of their ſeveral duties, that

that they may diſcharge them, and finiſh the taſk, as they eſteem it. But the nature of moral obligation does not admit of this. Our duty is never completely fulfilled. It extends to every thought, diſpoſition, word, and action, that forms a part of character through life, and to every obligation, as occurring circumſtances preſent them, to God, to all men, and to ourſelves. Theſe are too numerous to be particularly ſpecified. But what we ought to do in order to pleaſe the almighty, wiſe, and kind *parent* of all, and to benefit his *children*, and our *brethren*, is a moſt extenſive rule of conduct, and eaſily applicable to the various relations and occurrences of life.

This principle of piety and virtue, that God is our *father*, beſt defines the nature and extent of our duties to him and to all men, impreſſes the obligation to them with the greateſt force, and preſents the moſt powerful and engaging motives to the univerſal practice of them. It humbles the pride of man, by ſuggeſting the idea of our own frailty and dependance, while at the ſame time it calls us to ſupport with dignity the character we ſuſtain as children of the Moſt High.

II. Chriſtian religion and morals are new in the degree of their extent, their purity, and their ſimplicity, and in the manner in which they were taught by the great author and finiſher of our faith.

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity is deſigned for more general uſe than any other religion ever was before. It was a novel and ſublimely-benevolent idea, worthy of the laſt and moſt favoured meſſenger of heaven, to frame a *univerſal* religion. Heathen nations had each their appropriate gods and rites of worſhip. The Moſaic inſtitution was formed for a particular people. But the commiſſion which Chriſt gave to his apoſtles was, "Go and teach *all* nations." He tells them, "Thus it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer, and to riſe from "the dead the third day, and that repentance and "remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name "among *all* nations." Juſt before his aſcenſion, alſo, he ſays to them, "Ye ſhall be witneſſes unto "me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and in "Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt part of the earth." Does any other record, before the Chriſtian ſcriptures, preſent us with a plan formed and begun to be executed by its inventor, for the emancipation of *all* mankind from the bonds of error, ſuperſtition, and vice, and to prepare them for future and everlaſting happineſs?

Notwithſtanding the explicit directions of Chriſt to his apoſtles, however, they did not comprehend the grand idea, till God himſelf unfolded it to them, by ſending Peter to Cornelius. This ſublime myſtery, which had been hidden from ages and generations, was then explained; and the apoſtles perceived that it was matter of glorious "rejoicing

"that

" that God had to the Gentiles alſo granted re-
" pentance unto life."

Now upon what could ſuch an *univerſal* religion be more properly founded than upon the plain fact, that the object of it was the equal *father* of every human creature, and that " in every nation, he that " feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is ac-" cepted of him."

Again we may obſerve, that the Chriſtian religion is more *pure* and more *comprehenſive* than any other. It embraces a wider compaſs of moral duty.

The novelty and excellence of true Chriſtian worſhip conſiſts, in requiring no burdenſome ceremonies, in not being limited in any of its duties, even its ritual ones, to a particular time or place, and in being likewiſe throughout ſpiritual, internal, and univerſal in its influence on the heart and life. We have noticed before, that the religions of heathen nations had no connection with morals. Many of the rites which they preſcribed were vicious, they were as various as the fancied characters of the gods whoſe favor they hoped to conciliate, and were required to be performed in the temples appropriated to their honour. Zoroaſter, the chief of the Perſian Magi, inſtituted a local worſhip before the fires upon the altars in the temples, as well as an annual pilgrimage to the chief temple at the reſidence of the Archimagus. And Confucius, the Chineſe, recommended and conformed to the idolatrous rites of the common worſhip

of

of his countrymen, to inferior ſpirits. The law of Moſes inſtituted ſo burthenſome a ceremonial ſervice, that the apoſtle Peter ſpeaks of it as "a yoke which "neither their fathers nor they were able to bear." And this ſervice required frequent attendance at the temple in Jeruſalem. But Chriſt "has aboliſhed "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," or the poſitive commandments of the Moſaic inſtitution. The plain and ſimple rites of baptiſm, and the Lord's ſupper, are preſcribed in a manner ſuitable to the enlarged ſpirit of the religion of which they form a part. No expreſs limitation of time, or place, or many other minute circumſtances that were required in Jewiſh external ordinances, are annexed to thoſe of the goſpel. "The hour is now come, "when the true worſhipper ſhall worſhip the *father* "in ſpirit and in truth, for the *father* ſeeketh ſuch "to worſhip him." The religion of Chriſt is a religion of the heart, and the genuine fruits of inward piety will be accepted by the kind *father* of all, whenever and wherever the ſincere mind ſhall offer them. A religion intended for the whole human race, could not have any thing of mere locality in its compoſition.

Further, the habitual light in which the Chriſtian ſcriptures repreſent the Supreme Being as the *father* of all, naturally extends our view to the whole *family* of God, and engages us to feel for them all as our brethren. Heathen benevolence was circumſcribed

ſcribed by the narrow limits of their own country. And ſtrangers, or neighbours, were the terms by which Moſes uſually deſcribed the inhabitants of other nations. But when Jeſus ſpeaks even of an offending fellow-creature, in order, more ſtrongly, to enforce the duty that he enjoins, he ſelects one of thoſe very few inſtances in the Moſaic law, in which the term brother is not limited to Iſraelites; in order to make it the more conſpicuous that his religion recommended brotherly affection between *all men* towards each other. "If thy *brother* treſpaſs againſt "thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and "him alone, and if he ſhall hear thee, thou haſt "gained thy *brother*." What can be more tender and impreſſive? This ſurely is a ſingularly merciful and extenſive principle of morals. It is limited by no boundary, but that by which Deity has circumſcribed the number of his rational creatures. And it intereſts us for the happineſs of every individual of theſe in the ſame manner, though not in the ſame degree, as we ought to be intereſted for the members of the private family to which we belong. Chriſt has impreſſively illuſtrated the extent of this principle in various inſtances, but particularly, in his *inſtructions*, by the parable of the good Samaritan, and by his deſcription of the tranſactions of the judgment-day; and in his *example*, by the miraculous cure of ten lepers together, one of whom was a Samaritan, and by teaching the Samaritan woman, the

ſpiritual nature of that worſhip which he was come to eſtabliſh; for, on account merely of their being Samaritans, a Jew would have thought himſelf juſtifiable in withholding from them any uſeful inſtruction or good office.

Though the Jewiſh law commanded the children of Iſrael to love the ſtranger that ſojourned in their land, becauſe God loved the ſtranger, yet who will ſay that the Moſaic inſtitution preſcribes that degree of love which Jeſus enjoins when he ſays, "This is „ my commandment, that ye love one another as I "have loved you," and inſtances in laying down his life for them. Who that has examined the nature of the Moſaic and Chriſtian diſpenſations will ſay, that an inſtitution under which the Apoſtle Peter declares, "Ye know that it is an unlawful thing for a "man that is a Jew to keep company with or come "unto one of another nation," is adapted to cheriſh as warm and extenſive benevolence, as that in which "God hath ſhewed us that we ſhould not call any "man common or unclean?" The great author and finiſher of our faith inſtituted a plan for promoting the higheſt temporal and eternal happineſs of mankind in general, throughout all ages, to the end of time. Did ever any diſciple of Moſes entertain an idea ſo ſublimely benevolent? And yet, under the Chriſtian diſpenſation, the doctrines, the precepts, and the examples, both of Jeſus and his apoſtles, all concur in exciting every follower of Chriſt to be a worker

worker together with God in forwarding, to the utmoſt of his power, this grand, wiſe, and kind plan of Providence. Genuine Chriſtian faith characterizes itſelf by the ſingular and univerſal benevolence which it produces.

There is a moſt uſeful and important novelty in the precepts of our Lord, relative to the neareſt ſocial connection of human life, that deſerves our particular notice. Amongſt heathens in general, the marriage contract was not conſidered as requiring a ſtrict fidelity and inſeparable connection for life between the parties. And even the Moſaic law allowed of a man's divorcing his wife for ſlight reaſons, in which caſe each party might marry again. But Chriſt expreſsly limits the permiſſion of divorce to the ſingle caſe of infidelity to the principal article of the marriage contract, and forbids the party thus divorced to marry again during their joint lives. With reſpect to polygamy, likewiſe, it was not expreſsly prohibited by Moſes. But Chriſt, with all the authority of a divinely empowered teacher, reinforces the original command of God for ſuch an indiſſoluble union between man and wife during their joint lives, as does not admit of polygamy, any more than of divorce. Theſe reſtrictions are of more conſequence to the comfort and happineſs of life, than can eaſily be imagined. They tend to promote an entire harmony and confidence between the huſband and wife. They are of principal importance to the

economy, peace, and good order of families, and to the proper care and education of children. Further, as families are the nurſeries of character, the influence of perfect union and fidelity between huſband and wife has a wide effect upon ſociety in general. The nation, and the world at large, are benefited by regular domeſtic manners. Whereas a diſregard to the important duties of this firſt and principal connection in human life, is the means of ſpreading vice, confuſion, and diſcord, not only in the particular family in which it ſubſiſts, but to a much wider extent, and to a degree that is incalculable.

We may obſerve, further, that no religion, before the Chriſtian, ever laid ſo much ſtreſs upon the right government of the inward thoughts of the mind as this does. The goſpel teaches us that there is not an idea we form, a ſecret intention of the ſoul, or a diſpoſition of the heart, that is not as much the ſubject of moral law, as the words we ſpeak, and our outward actions. This is coming to the ſource and fountain of virtue and vice, and lays the ſureſt baſis for the beſt habits. That excellent ſermon on the Mount, which Chriſt delivered at the entrance upon his miniſtry, to the multitude that came from ſeveral different regions, as well as to his diſciples, begins with laying a particular ſtreſs upon the inward diſpoſitions, and abounds, in the general tenor of it, with ſimilar directions applied to particular duties. In the whole courſe of his miniſtry, the inſtructions of

Jeſus

Jeſus are alſo pointed to the inward ideas and motives of action, to purify and regulate them. This is not an abſolutely new idea. But it is new in the degree in which it is recommended and enforced. What in the teachings of Chriſt and his apoſtles was habitually enjoined, by the ſtrongeſt poſſible arguments, and extended to all the operations of the mind, was occaſional only even in the Moſaic law, and by the heathens, if we except Confucius, ſeems to have been little, if at all, regarded.

The law of Moſes, indeed, commands the Jews not even to covet or deſire any thing that was their neighbour's property, to love God with all their hearts and ſouls, and to love their neighbour, and alſo the ſtranger, as they loved themſelves. And the love of God towards the ſtranger is propoſed to them for their imitation. The pſalms of David, and the proverbs of Solomon, alſo, contain many inſtructions relative to the inward temper of the mind. The wiſe man has cautioned us to guard our hearts with all diligence, and has told us that "the thought "of fooliſhneſs," or a wicked thought, "is ſinful." And the prophets forcibly declaim againſt pride and ſelfiſhneſs, as the ſource of thoſe vices which made the Jewiſh as well as other nations the objects of divine diſpleaſure.

But the ſtreſs which is laid upon the inward thoughts and diſpoſitions pervades the inſtructions of Jeſus, is extended to the whole compaſs of human

ſentiment

ſentiment and imagination, and is made a prominent and diſtinguiſhing feature in the religion of the goſpel. There is, moreover, a great and important difference between conſidering ſuch directions as being occaſional, and their being perpetually pointed out to our view as the characteriſtics, and deciſive traits, of any ſyſtem. The habitual ſtreſs which is laid upon the right government of the thoughts in the New Teſtament, is a mark of the ſagacity of the founder of chriſtianity, and his deep knowledge of the human heart.

The natural effect of a due regard to ſuch precepts, muſt be purity, and moral excellence, of heart and life. Accordingly it was predicted, by Jeremiah, "Behold the days come, ſaith the Lord, that I will "make this new covenant with the houſe of Iſrael, "and of Juda; I will write my law in their hearts, "and all of them, from the leaſt unto the greateſt, "ſhall know me." Ezekiel further ſays, "A new "heart and a new ſpirit will God put into his peo- "ple, and cauſe them to walk in his ſtatutes."

It deſerves our particular notice, that the goſpel lays a peculiar ſtreſs on that fairneſs and honeſty of mind, which is neceſſary to form a proper judgment of the comparative value of the things that relate to this life and the future. "The light of the body," ſays Jeſus, "is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be "clear, thy whole body ſhall be enlightened." If a true idea of things be preſerved, the mind will have a proper

a proper guide, and be well regulated. " But if " thine eye be diſtempered, thy whole body will be " in darkneſs." If the judgment be corrupted, the ſoul will have a falſe guide, and the conſequence muſt be injurious. " Can the blind guide the blind ſafely? " will they not both fall into a pit?" Wrong judgments in this matter lead to miſery.

Again, Jeſus inculcates the greateſt ſincerity in doing, as well as in judging, of the will of our heavenly *father*. That " purity of heart," which is requiſite to our " ſeeing God," includes ſimplicity of mind, acting from the dictates of conſcience, and the revealed will of our heavenly father. Outward actions of piety and charity are not reckoned as truly virtuous and religious, unleſs they proceed from a right temper. " If our hearts condemn us, God " is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; " but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we " confidence towards God."

Further, no religion, beſides the Chriſtian, ſo fully enforces this principle, that we ought to renounce vice of every kind, and to do the will of our heavenly *father* without being deterred by any temporary evils. Chriſtians muſt be ready " to deny them- " ſelves, to take up their croſs daily, to leave houſes, " or parents, or brethren, or lands, and even to give " up life itſelf, if theſe ſacrifices be demanded by our " duty. But an ample recompence of inward peace " in this life, and an unfading crown of glory and

" happineſs

" happineſs hereafter, are offered to all thoſe who " continue faithful unto death."

The love of power for our own private advantage, is checked in an unprecedented manner by the goſpel. The ſermon on the Mount was peculiarly levelled againſt the contracted and ambitious views which the diſciples of Chriſt, and the Jewiſh nation in general, had entertained of their Meſſiah, as a temporal prince, and their deliverer from the Roman yoke. Jeſus alſo takes many opportunities, in the courſe of his miniſtry, to correct that ſelfiſh deſire of dominion which his diſciples poſſeſſed, who imagined that his kingdom would be a temporal one. But when he ſent his apoſtles and diſciples to preach the goſpel in Judea, during his own miniſtry, he, unaſked, imparted to them power more than human to cure diſeaſes. And after his aſcenſion, a greater degree of it was communicated to them. This was done, however, not to gratify their love of power, but to advance the preſent and eternal happineſs of mankind in general, by giving proofs of his and their divine commiſſion.

Again, to gratify the love of pleaſure, and the deſire of happineſs, which are natural to man, Jeſus elevates and extends the views of his diſciples, and fixes them upon the joys of religion and virtue, as the pureſt ſource of the moſt ſolid ſatisfaction both here and hereafter. Every indulgence, even in thought and idea, that debaſes the character and terminates

minates in miſery, is forbidden. Chriſt commands his followers not even to wiſh to lay up treaſures upon earth as their chief good, as this will corrupt the mind; "for where the treaſure is, there," ſays he, "will the heart be alſo."

Jeſus, by his example and inſtructions, peculiarly diſcourages every ſpecies of pride and vanity, that would lead men to ſet too high a value, either upon their own merit, abilities, or advantages, or upon the applauſe of their fellow-creatures. Though Solomon had ſaid, "Pride was not made for man;" and though the prophets had inveighed ſtrongly againſt it, yet we may appeal to any impartial reader of the Old and New Teſtament, whether humility is not an undeniable characteriſtic of the goſpel religion. "Bleſſed "are the poor in ſpirit," meaning the humble and unambitious, began that liſt of beatitudes which Chriſt pronounced in his firſt public diſcourſe. And, through the whole of their miniſtry, both he and his apoſtles inculcated the ſame ſentiment ſo diſtinctly, and with ſo much energy and perſuaſion, that it is unneceſſary to adduce particular paſſages, to ſhew that humility is as much a characteriſtic quality of a true Chriſtian as charity itſelf. Nor can ſteady diſintereſted charity ſubſiſt without it. They are ſo intimately united and combined together, that all the characters which the Apoſtle Paul gives of the one, are equally applicable to the other.

We

We muſt not omit to mention, that in the goſpel morality there is an exactneſs, propriety, and delicacy, in extruding even motives of action, which are innocent conſidered in their own nature, and approvable in other caſes, from tainting a pious and virtuous deed in the ſlighteſt manner. It is notorious, that he who acts from the love of the praiſe of men more than, or equally with, the praiſe of God, muſt do wrong. But Chriſt teaches the greateſt refinement of virtue. In how ſmall a degree ſoever a regard to worldly reputation, as the ultimate motive, mixes with a regard to the will of God, in an equal degree, he aſſures us, does it diminiſh the ſincere piety and virtue of the heart in that inſtance.

He enjoins an entire ſecrecy in private acts of almsgiving and prayer, and forbids the leaſt regard to the approbation of our fellow-creatures in the performance of them. Reaſon, thus inſtructed, juſtly extends the rule to other duties. But when by rendering our good example conſpicuous, when by public donations the effects of our beneficence are more widely extended, by being more generally known and approved, and when by the public worſhip of God we may excite others by our practice to worſhip him in ſincerity, then, as well as in other caſes, his precept is, "Let your light ſo ſhine before "men, that they may ſee your good works, and glo-"rify your *father* who is in heaven." And upon the ſame principle the apoſtle exhorts the Philippians,

"To

"To ſhine as lights in the world, holding out the "word of life." But in no caſe muſt worldly fame influence us. Whether our actions be public or private, we muſt not perform them in order to have glory of men, but to be approved by God. This greatly extends the moral law, to a degree that was never before enjoined by any teacher of religion and virtue. It ſublimes the moſt delicate of all the ſelfiſh principles of action, a regard to our own good name, into a ſentiment of the pureſt piety, into a wiſh to aſſimilate ourſelves to infinite perfection. For it is only by reſembling our heavenly *father*, that we can hope for his regard. Again, the precept, to look to God only for approbation, is moſt reaſonable, becauſe he alone knows how far we deſerve it.

All the ſelfiſh principles which we have noticed, are checked and regulated by Chriſt, at the entrance upon his miniſtry, in his ſermon on the Mount. Therefore it muſt have been a peculiar object of his miſſion. The apoſtles, alſo, acting upon the ſame idea, exhort Chriſtians "to walk by faith, not by "ſight; to live by the faith of the ſon of God;" namely, in the firm belief of a future ſtate of recompence, which he propoſes as the great object of our faith. This is the beſt preventative, and the beſt remedy, of vice. For by this means the attention is diverted from that exceſſive attachment to worldly objects, which produces irreligion and bad morals, and is fixed upon thoſe future permanent realities,

which

which are the ſtrongeſt incitements to univerſal piety and virtue. Neither Moſes, nor the prophets, nor heathen philoſophers, ſo forcibly ſtruck the axe to the root of iniquity.

The great object of chriſtianity is, to refine and exalt the human mind, to improve that image of God in which it was at firſt created, to the greateſt poſſible reſemblance of its perfect author. Each little rill of ſelfiſhneſs or partial fondneſs, it diverts into the broad ſtream of human kindneſs, which gladdens the wide creation as it flows, till it reach again that pure fountain of felicity from which it ſprang.

Another characteriſtic of the religion of Jeſus is, that it diſtinctly informs us, our deſerts will be eſtimated, and our rewards adjuſted, not according to the ſplendor and effects of our actions, but according to the circumſtances, abilities, and diſpoſitions, of the agent. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do "right?" was indeed a ſentiment uttered by the patriarch Abraham. A perſuaſion of the divine juſtice was, alſo, probably coeval with the idea of Deity. But the more particular illuſtration of thoſe general rules, by which God will diſtribute rewards to the good, was reſerved for Jeſus. This doctrine, relative to the valuation of human virtues, is beautifully illuſtrated in the ſtory of the widow who caſt two mites into the treaſury, whoſe gift was reckoned by Chriſt of more value, in a moral view, than the large donations of the rich; for this, being all ſhe had to give,

give, proved that her charity was fully equal to her ability, while the gifts of the rich were only a part of that ſuperfluity which occaſioned them no inconvenience to part with. Jeſus teaches us, that it is the liberality of the diſpoſition, not profuſe donations, that conſtitutes the eſſence of charity. He moreover aſſures us, that whoſoever ſhall do the ſmalleſt act of diſintereſted kindneſs to any diſciple of his, ſhall not loſe his reward. The rules by which God will diſtribute future rewards, ~~is~~ are further enlarged upon, in the parables of the pounds, and of the talents, and in the deſcription of the proceedings of the judgment-day, which are preſerved by the Evangeliſt Matthew, as well as in ſeveral other parts of the New Teſtament.

It is a peculiar and novel excellence of the religion and morals of Chriſt, that they are complete, and without any defect, or inconſiſtency. The more knowledge of every kind is increaſed, the more are the Chriſtian doctrines, relative to God and our duty, admired and approved by all wiſe and good men. The examples and inſtructions of the goſpel contain ſuch an intire view of moral and religious truth and duty, that no perſon has ever added a ſingle good ſentiment, or rule of piety or virtue, to them. Every thing eminently valuable, which has been written upon theſe ſubjects, is derived from this ſource. Human ſagacity may have applied the general ideas and general injunctions of Chriſt, or his apoſtles, to more particular circumſtances, but it has added nothing to

the

the fountain of truth. All the works of God bear the ſtamp of their divine origin, and prove the unity of their cauſe by their harmony with each other. The goſpel, like the book of nature, though always before us, abounds with ſuch numberleſs excellencies, that they are not diſcerned at the firſt view, but require a ſeries of ages for even the moſt attentive, diligent, and ſagacious, to inveſtigate them. We need not wonder that we do not ſoon diſcover all the characteriſtic traits of a ſyſtem which is formed to aſſimilate us to the perfection of our heavenly *father*, and from which, therefore, mankind muſt continually derive increaſing improvement, the greater advances they make in knowledge and virtue.

The value of that entire completeneſs and conſiſtency, which is diſplayed in the religion and morals of Chriſt, will, perhaps, be beſt appreciated by conſidering that imperfection muſt neceſſarily accompany whatever originates in frailty. We ſee that it uniformly characterizes every production of man. The beſt collection of *moral* maxims, excepting the ſcriptures, which perhaps was ever made, and which is even diſtinguiſhed for the ſtreſs it lays upon the proper regulation of the thoughts and deſires of the heart, bears this ſtamp of humanity.

In the contents of the 17th article of the 3d claſſical or canonical book of Confucius, called the *Book of Maxims*, of which Du Halde has given an account in his hiſtory of China, there is the following paſ-

ſage:

ſage: "There are four ſorts of people that a wiſe "man ſhould *hate*, ſays *Confucius*, 1. Thoſe envious "ſpirits that love to publiſh other people's failings. "2. Thoſe low wretches who love to ſpeak evil of "their princes. 3. Thoſe powerful men who have "no ſentiments of humanity. 4. Thoſe raſh and "daring people who act without thought. *Tsu kung*, "one of his diſciples, taking up the diſcourſe, there "are three more, ſays he, that I cannot bear. "1. Thoſe ignorant and groſs people who ſtrive to "appear full of knowledge and judgment. 2. Thoſe "high and preſumptuous ſpirits who affect courage "and valour. 3. Thoſe ſatyrical and carping ſpirits "who would be thought honeſt and ſincere."

After reading ſuch precepts from ſo eminent a moral philoſopher, how much more ardently do we admire the following inſtructions of Jeſus; which, while they aſtoniſh us with their novelty and excellence, actually impreſs on the heart thoſe benign ſentiments which they enjoin. "Ye have heard that "it hath been ſaid, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, "and hate thine enemy: but I ſay unto you, love "your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good "to them that hate you, and pray for them that de-"ſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you; that ye may "be the children of your Father, who is in heaven: "for he maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and on "the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt and on the "unjuſt. For if ye love thoſe that love you, what

"reward

" reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the
" ſame? And if ye ſalute your brethren only, what
" do ye more than others? Do not even the publi-
" cans ſo? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your
" Father who is in heaven is perfect."

The *religion* of Confucius is alſo inconſiſtent with itſelf. While it teaches the univerſal ſupremacy of the Moſt High, and the appropriate parental relation which he ſuſtained to the Chineſe, it likewiſe recommends the worſhip of other beings as deities. In the 3d article of his maxims, Confucius treats of " the *religious duties* owing to inferior ſpirits." And he joined with the Emperor, the kings, the philoſophers, and the people of China, in religious rites and ſacrifices to them. This is dividing the honor which is due to God only.

As one part of his religion is thus diſcordant with another part of it, and one part of his morals with another; ſo the *religion* and the *morals* are at variance. For God being conſidered as their parent, it cannot be conſiſtent with this idea, to diſtinguiſh ſeveral claſſes of his offspring, and their own brethren, as the objects of their hatred.

It is ſcarcely neceſſary to add, becauſe it is ſo obvious, that as the precepts of the goſpel are the precepts of our kind and all-perfect heavenly *father*, ſo the obedience which they require, is ſingularly liberal and ingenuous. They only inculcate an obedience to that truth which will make us free from the galling

bondage

bondage of ſuperſtition and vice. God has not given us in the goſpel "the ſpirit of fear, but of power, "of love, and of a ſound mind." The Apoſtle James, therefore, truly ſtiles it "The perfect law "of liberty."

The religion of Chriſt, beſides being ſuperior to all others when conſidered in itſelf, was taught by him in a *manner* equally ſingular and excellent. He connected his moſt valuable inſtructions with familiar facts. We have already noticed that he made the plain fact, that God is our common *father*, the baſis of his religious and moral doctrine. In the hands of this maſterly inſtructor, the idea of a *parent*, which is a limited and confined idea, is employed to expand the nobleſt, moſt refined, and valuable ſentiments of the heart, to the greateſt poſſible degree. Jeſus never mixed any merely civil, metaphyſical, or political truths with any thing that he taught. Nothing was delivered by him in the view of ſpeculation only, nothing to gratify mere curioſity. No doubts or uncertainties ever appeared in his teaching. No marks of gaining his knowledge in the uſual way of repeated inquiry and long reaſoning. His inſtructions were characterized by the greateſt ſimplicity of language and ſentiment, even when the moſt exalted ideas were conveyed. It is often remarked, that "he "ſpake with authority, and not as the ſcribes." There muſt ſurely have been ſomething uncommonly moving, maſterly, and commanding, in his addreſſes,

when the officers who were ſent to apprehend him returned, at the hazard of being puniſhed for diſobedience, without executing their commiſſion, and bore this teſtimony to Jeſus, that "never man ſpake "like this man."

With what induſtry, ſagacity, and gentleneſs, does he uniformly improve every opportunity of conveying his inſtructions, not merely to the well-diſpoſed, but, to the froward, the curious, the malicious, the prejudiced, and the ſlow of heart to apprehend his meaning! How ſkilfully does he connect the truths of religion with the various ſenſible objects that preſented themſelves before his audience at the time he was ſpeaking! How admirably does he make the ſeaſon of the year, the time of the day, the place in which he was, the occupation and circumſtances of thoſe whom he was addreſſing, public affairs and occurrences, extraordinary accidents, hiſtorical facts, and preſent incidents, the perpetual monitors of what he had taught! With what more than human penetration does he addreſs the thoughts and intentions of his hearers, before they are uttered! With what unequalled wiſdom does he obviate doubts, anſwer objections, and detect the ſtratagems of his inveterate enemies before they had been expreſſed! Who ever inſtructed ſo meekly, with ſuch elegance and force, and with ſo much eaſe and readineſs, upon every occaſion, as Jeſus did by his unrivalled parables? Though they were all ſpoken to ſuit preſent immediate

immediate occurrences, yet who has ever equalled them with all the leiſurely exertions of their ingenuity? How are the parables of Chriſt characterized by their ſimplicity, their perſpicuity, their elegance, the excellence of the ſentiments they convey, and a wonderful variety, ſuited to the different capacities and diſpoſitions of his auditors, and to the ſeveral truths and duties which he meant to impreſs on their minds!

When we contemplate the unparalleled perfection of the inſtructions themſelves which Jeſus delivered, and the wonderful ſkill with which he conveyed them, how can we refrain from joining the aſtoniſhed multitude who heard the gracious words proceeding from his mouth, "Whence hath this man this wiſ-"dom, not having learned?" Let us join their natural exclamation, but not imitate them in being "offended at him." For though the parents of Jeſus lived in an humble ſituation, and he had none of the advantages of human learning, yet theſe very circumſtances more fully diſplayed the divinity of his miſſion, they proved to a grateful and admiring world, that, in the ſituation in which he was, he had no natural means of gaining even the ſuperior ideas which he communicated to mankind in ſo powerful and perſuaſive a manner, and, therefore, that he muſt have derived them from the great fountain of wiſdom. "If," ſays Biſhop Taylor, "wiſdom, and "mercy, and juſtice, and ſimplicity, and holineſs,

" and purity, and meekneſs, and contentedneſs, and
" charity, be images of God and rays of divinity,
" then that doctrine in which all theſe ſhine ſo glo-
" rioufly, and in which nothing elſe is an ingredient,
" muſt needs be from God."

III. The religion of the goſpel is new in this reſpect, that it contains, in the *character* of its *author*, an exemplification and pattern of that complete ſyſtem of piety and virtue which it teaches, as far as he had an opportunity of exhibiting it.

The friends and diſciples of Jeſus repreſent him as being without ſin. And his enemies vainly endeavoured to prove their account to be falſe.

There is no circumſtance in the life of Jeſus from which it can be concluded that he had the leaſt deſire of unlawful pleaſure, intereſt, fame, or worldly dominion. Every thing ſhews the contrary. Innocent ſocial enjoyments he partook of. He was gueſt at a marriage feaſt, and miraculouſly provided a part of the entertainment, at the firſt entrance upon his miniſtry. In many inſtances he ſat at table with large and mixed companies. The Phariſees, therefore, ſaid he was a glutton, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and ſinners. But none ever produced the leaſt evidence that he tranſgreſſed the bounds of temperance; though the Phariſees often dined with him, and would have gladly ſeized an opportunity of doing it.

To

To all the wealth and ſordid intereſts of the world he ſhewed no regard. He never made the leaſt advantage of his popularity with his followers to gain riches, or raiſe any property for himſelf. He truſted the bag which held the money that was to provide neceſſaries for him and his diſciples to Judas, though he knew he would prove a traitor. When the rich young man came to him to learn his duty, he told him to "ſell all that he had, and give "it to the poor." He was obliged even to work a miracle to furniſh what was requiſite to pay the tribute for the ſervice of the Temple.

That he had no view to general fame, influence, or dominion, appeared through his whole conduct. He forbad many of thoſe, whom he had cured of diſeaſes, to publiſh the effects of his extraordinary power. Whenever the inſtructions he gave were received with peculiar approbation, and the people voluntarily crouded about him, he retired from them to converſe with his diſciples only, or withdrew from them, either to the other ſide of the ſea, or into the wilderneſs, or to ſome other part of the country. When they would have made him a king, he inſtantly fled from his zealous followers. His ſermon on the Mount, at the beginning of his miniſtry, was particularly pointed againſt the worldly views of his auditors in all the reſpects which we have mentioned. His own example, alſo, was a pattern of what he taught.

If he had had any view to fame, influence, or power, he would have attached as large a party to himſelf as he poſſibly could. Wherever he went he would have taken means to have preſerved his followers connected and in a body. If he ſaw a probability of ſucceeding in his ambitious projects, he would have appeared at their head, and have encouraged them to brave danger in his cauſe. The minds of the Jewiſh people were even prepared for this. They expected a temporal Meſſiah and conqueror, who was to deliver them from the Roman yoke. But Jeſus took no advantage of the errors and prejudices of his followers. He never attempted to form any large ſociety of which he ſhould be conſidered as the chief, or any ſociety at all under any particular name. The twelve diſciples, whom he was preparing to ſucceed himſelf in the arduous taſk of reforming the world, and a very few friends, were his chief aſſociates. He never appeared deſirous of attracting public notice, except when he wiſhed to engage the attention of men to their moſt important intereſts, or to inſtruct them in ſuch uſeful truths, and with ſuch energy, as no other perſon could. After this he let them depart without any further view, than that of inſtructing them again when opportunity offered. He only practiſed the rule which he gave to his followers: "He let his light ſo ſhine before men, that they "ſeeing his good works might glorify their hea-"venly father." This was the ultimate object of his

his life. Knowing, alſo, that the religion he taught would extend through the world, and remain to the moſt diſtant ages of it, he acted ſo as to afford the ſtrongeſt evidence to the end of time, that no temporary motives ever gave riſe to it, but that his views were perfectly pure, diſintereſted, moſt extenſively benevolent, and truly pious.

At his laſt trial the inveterate foes of Chriſt wanted neither power, inclination, nor opportunity, to have convicted him of any thing wrong. And though they had been watching time after time for matter of accuſation againſt him, yet no blemiſh appeared. The ſtricteſt ſcrutiny could not diſcover any thing to ſully the purity of his character, ſo that Pilate himſelf, at the ſame time that he complied with the calls of the multitude to condemn Jeſus, gave the ſtrongeſt teſtimony to his innocence. Judas, alſo, the diſciple and conſtant attendant of Chriſt, who muſt know his character, and who afterwards betrayed him, atteſted the ſame in a manner that was unexceptionable, and peculiarly ſtrong, and which nothing but the fact could have extorted from him. This ſpotleſs purity is unprecedented. The ancient patriarchs, Moſes, the prophets, and heathen inſtructors, all had ſome moral defects. Of no one on earth could it ever be ſaid, excepting Jeſus, that " he did no ſin, neither " was guile found in his mouth."

But beſides the abſence of vice, Chriſt gave an example of every virtue, that he had an opportunity of practiſing,

practiſing. In the ſame character he united and combined ſuch very different and ſeemingly oppoſite moral excellencies, that they were heightened and illuſtrated by contraſt, and rendered him a pattern of ſuch exalted virtue, as never before or ſince appeared in the world. It has been the ſubject of many valuable treatiſes to diſplay, what indeed appears moſt evidently from the goſpel hiſtory, the unequalled wiſdom and prudence, the ſteady, diſintereſted, and unconquerable benevolence, of Jeſus, his habitual, calmly joyful, and active, piety, the purity, the humility, the patient fortitude, and the undeviating ſincerity, that characterized his life.

Now is not the union of ſo many excellent qualities unprecedented in human nature? Is it not, alſo, a ſtrong evidence of the truth of ſo pure and novel a religion? Could all theſe virtues have been united in an impoſtor? Is it poſſible that the practice of paſſing a cheat upon the world, ſhould elevate to higher character and greater purity of heart, than actually being what one appears to be? Can light and darkneſs dwell together? Can hyprocriſy and ſincerity be intimate aſſociates in the ſame breaſt? The very character of Jeſus, his wonderful exemplification of his own tranſcendent doctrine, evince that he was what he pretended to be, the favoured meſſenger of the Moſt High. The character of Chriſt is too calm, judicious, and conſiſtent, for an enthuſiaſt, too virtuous and ſincere for an impoſtor. There is abundantly

dantly more evidence for the reality of the finiſhed character of Jeſus, than there is for the character of Alexander, or Julius Cæſar. We read the delineation of it in the plain narrative of the goſpel, and we may challenge any perſon to give a rational account, how the Evangeliſts could have written the hiſtory, if they had not taken it from real life. Further, as wiſdom, conſiſtency, and ſincerity, are prominent features of this character, the irreſiſtible proof which we have of its reality, is ſo much evidence, that the ſolemn aſſertions which he made are true, "My doctrine is "not mine, but his that ſent me; the works that I do "bear witneſs of me, that the *father* hath ſent me."

In order to give the ſeveral internal arguments for the reality of the character and divine miſſion of Jeſus, at which we have hinted, their proper force, we ought to conſider that, before the Chriſtian æra, Plato, one of the moſt eminent of the Grecian philoſophers, with the utmoſt exertion of his abilities, could not form even an idea of a character equal to that of Chriſt. Much leſs could he, by a detail of converſations, diſcourſes, and actions, have given life and animation to ſo pure, conſiſtent, and complete a moral character, accompanied with ſuch extraordinary manifeſtations of wiſdom and power, as was that of our Lord. Nor have the attempts of philoſophers, ſince the publication of the memoirs of Jeſus, been more ſucceſsful. The trials that have been made to draw up feigned accounts of miſſionaries

from

from heaven, and to impoſe them upon the world as real, have proved how inadequate human abilities are to the invention and delineation of a perfect character of this kind. The eſſays which Porphyry and Jamblicus have made reſpecting Pythagoras, and the hiſtory which Philoſtratus has given of Apollonius Tyanæus, are inſtances to our preſent purpoſe. All of them have inſerted ſo many trifling, ridiculous, and inconſiſtent particulars in their narratives, as are themſelves ſufficient to prove that their ſtories were fictitious. Any one will be convinced of this who attends to what Lardner, in his Teſtimonies of Ancient Heathens, has written upon theſe hiſtories, and to the obſervations which the author of the Criterion, or Miracles examined, has made upon the life of Apollonius.

No human imagination can adequately conceive of the advantages for moral improvement, which may be derived from ſpotleſs and unrivalled goodneſs, thus repreſented to mankind as actually exiſting in the life and manners of a teacher of pure religion. The benefit is ineſtimable. All artiſts know that perfect models are more inſtructive than the beſt rules, ſince they alone can exhibit the chief excellencies of a Maſter. And the precepts of diſtinguiſhed performers are always received with peculiar attention and reſpect.

IV. The *motives* which the goſpel urges to an obedience to its laws, are more cogent, perſuaſive, and

and animating, than thoſe which are offered in any other ſyſtem of religion.

Jeſus commands us to endeavour to be perfect as our heavenly *father* is perfect. His will and approbation are urged upon us as incitements to every virtue. The love of Chriſt, in even laying down his life for the everlaſting benefit of mankind, is offered as a motive to excite us to all piety and goodneſs. Jeſus has, moreover, in a ſingularly beautiful and pathetic manner, diſplayed the paternal tenderneſs and mercy of our heavenly *father* to repenting ſinners, in parables, and in other plainer inſtructions, to encourage mankind to forſake iniquity, and to become the objects of his favor. This is done in a more impreſſive way in the goſpel than by Moſes. Pardon upon ſincere repentance and amendment is there clearly revealed, without requiring the performance of thoſe external rites which were preſcribed to the Jews. Chriſt has likewiſe diſtinctly aſſerted the reality of a univerſal reſurrection of mankind to a future life. He has alſo fully proved this important doctrine, by the miracles which he wrought, by the ancient prophecies which he fulfilled, by the predictions which he himſelf uttered, and which have been ſince accompliſhed, and eſpecially by his own reſurrection from the dead, and aſcenſion into heaven.

Concerning this moſt important truth, the wiſeſt and beſt of the heathen philoſophers were in great doubt and uncertainty. Socrates, Plato, and Cicero, have

have left ample proofs of this. Yet, without the moſt convincing evidence of this doctrine, what baſis is there for the higheſt virtue? The bare perception of ſingle unconnected moral truths, by ſeveral different philoſophers, who were unable thoroughly and clearly to explain them, and who could not enforce their obligation, was not likely to produce much good effect, either upon themſelves or upon others. When Socrates urged moderation in ſenſual pleaſure upon his diſciples, and at the ſame time expreſſed his doubtfulneſs of a future life; when Confucius recommended the practice of virtue, but could not give any full aſſurance of forgiveneſs of ſin, or of a recompence hereafter; what general effect could be looked for from their inſtructions? Fact proves how inadequate the reſearches of philoſophers were, to recover mankind from vice, and to produce habits of piety and virtue. However the ſpeculative reaſonings of ſome moderns may lead them to ſuppoſe, that the precepts of pagan morality were alone capable of reforming the human race, yet Cicero was of a different opinion. He ſays, that "As in bodily diſorder it matters nothing, whether "a diſeaſe be ſuch as that no man does, or no man "can recover from it, ſo neither does it make any "difference, whether by philoſophy no man is, or "no man can be, made wiſe and good."

Though the Moſaic law gives no expreſs promiſes of a future life to the good, but incites the Iſraelites

to

to obedience to the commands of God chiefly by temporal encouragements and threatenings, yet the translation of Enoch would be ſome intimation to the Jews, that, if they pleaſed God, they might be the objects of his favor beyond the duration of this life. This being followed, after an interval of about 2500 years, by the tranſlation of Elijah in the preſence of Eliſha, (and, perhaps, in the view of the 50 perſons who remained on the other ſide of Jordan) might add to their hopes. The intervention of death in every other human being would, however, render theſe caſes leſs applicable to mankind in general.

" The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing " in of a better hope did. Jeſus is the mediator of " a better covenant which is eſtabliſhed upon better " promiſes than that of Moſes. Chriſt came that " his followers might have life, and that they might " have it more abundantly." By raiſing three perſons from the dead, he proved from viſible fact both to his friends and enemies, and by dying and being himſelf raiſed to life again, he proved in the ſame manner to 500 of his diſciples at once, not only that the dead might poſſibly be raiſed, but alſo that the doctrine which he taught of the general reſurrection of mankind to life again, was a doctrine preached by the authority of God himſelf; ſince no one could have worked ſuch miracles as Chriſt did, " except God were with him," and ſince God would never have raiſed a lying prophet to life again, in order to atteſt a ſyſtem of falſehood.

This new and full aſſurance of life and immortality, founded on plain and deciſive facts, exhibited to public view for the very purpoſe of eſtabliſhing this doctrine, is an ineſtimable gift from our heavenly *father*. It is the firmeſt baſis of piety and virtue, and the moſt powerful argument againſt vice of every kind. It fixes the wavering character, ſatisfies the doubtful enquirer, cheers the deſponding heart, and animates the faithful diſciple of Jeſus to go on in his way rejoicing.

The importance of having a future life fully aſſured to us will appear more clearly, by comparing the different effects which diſbelief, doubtfulneſs, and a full conviction of its reality, have upon the mind.

Mr. Hume, in the concluſion of the firſt volume of his Treatiſe of Human Nature, profeſſes to have ſhewn that "The underſtanding when it acts alone, "and according to its moſt general principles, en- "tirely ſubverts itſelf, and leaves not the loweſt de- "gree of evidence in any propoſition, either in phi- "loſophy or common life." And he afterwards thus deſcribes his own ſituation: "The intenſe view of "the manifold contradictions and imperfections in "human reaſon, have ſo wrought upon me, and "heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all be- "lief and reaſoning, and can look upon no opinion "even as more probable or likely than another. "Where am I, or what? From what cauſes do I "derive my exiſtence, and to what condition ſhall I "return?

" return? Whoſe favour ſhall I court, and whoſe " anger muſt I dread? What beings ſurround me? " And on whom have I any influence, or who have " any influence on me? I am confounded with " all theſe queſtions, and begin to fancy myſelf in " the moſt deplorable condition imaginable, envi- " roned with the deepeſt darkneſs, and utterly de- " prived of the uſe of every member and faculty."

In a letter of the Abbé l'Anglois, from Paris, dated June 24, 1761, inſerted in the life of Thomas Hollis, he writes as follows: " Nothing would af- " fright me here below, nothing would diſturb my " peace, not even if I were to die in miſery and tor- " ments, if God would ſufficiently convince my mind, " that the immenſe deſire my heart has to exiſt for " ever in happineſs, would be realized. It is hard, " it is uncomfortable, to fear to fall into nothing, " after having ſtruggled through one's whole life, " even till the whole man is exhauſted, for the prize " of a happy eternity."

He writes again, July 31, 1761: " I am an adorer " of a Divine Providence, nothing comes to paſs but " according to its ordinances. I am obliged to re- " ſign myſelf to it, whatever I may ſuffer from it. " If there is a better ſtate of being than the preſent, " one cannot go to it too ſoon. If there is nothing " to hope for after death, one cannot put an end to " ſo many evils, and to this life itſelf, too ſoon."

With

With theſe gloomy feelings of Hume and l'Anglois, let us compare thoſe of firm believers in a future life.

Paul of Tarſus, after he had imbibed the reviving ſentiments of the goſpel faith, writes thus to his friend Timothy: "I am now ready to be offered, and the "time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a "good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the "faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown "of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous "judge, ſhall give me at that day; and not to me "only, but unto all them alſo that love his appearing."

The following animated deſcription which he gives of the general reſurrection, and the happy conſequences of it, is the faith and hope of every diſciple of Jeſus: "Behold, I ſhew you a myſtery; we ſhall "not all ſleep, but we ſhall all be changed, in a "moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the laſt "trump; for the trumpet ſhall ſound, and the dead "ſhall be raiſed incorruptible, and we ſhall be "changed. For this corruptible muſt put on incor-"ruption, and this mortal muſt put on immortality. "Then ſhall be brought to paſs the ſaying that is "written, Death is ſwallowed up in victory. O "death, where is thy ſting? O grave, where is thy "victory? The ſting of death is ſin, and the ſtrength "of ſin is the law. But thanks be to God who "giveth us the victory, by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt,

"unmoveable,

" unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the " Lord, for as much as ye *know* that your labor is " not in vain in the Lord."

This faith and hope infuſed joy into the hearts of the primitive Chriſtians under the ſevereſt trials; this emboldened the proteſtant reformers to brave the dreadful perſecutions they endured; and this will enable every ſincere diſciple of Jeſus, to view with placid calmneſs the approach of death. Animated by this, Addiſon, in his laſt hours, ſent for his ſon-in-law, Lord Warwick, to ſhew him how a Chriſtian could die. Doddridge, alſo, wrote to a friend, " I ſee " indeed no hope of my recovery; yet *my heart re-* " *joiceth* in my God and my Saviour; and I call him, " under this failure of every thing elſe, *its ſtrength* " *and everlaſting portion.*"

Further, Dr. Leechman, late principal of the college at Glaſgow, at the cloſe of life, thus addreſſed the ſon of a worthy nobleman who was deſigned for the church, and the early part of whoſe education had been much under the Doctor's eye: " You ſee the " ſituation I am in. I have not many days to live; and " I am glad you have had an opportunity of witneſs- " ing the tranquillity of my laſt moments. But it is " not tranquillity and compoſure alone; it is joy and " triumph; it is complete exultation." ' His fea- ' tures kindled, his voice roſe as he ſpoke.' " And " whence," ' ſays he,' " does this exultation ſpring? " From that book, (pointing to a bible that lay on a

" table) from that book, too much neglected indeed,
" but which contains invaluable treaſures! treaſures
" of joy and rejoicing; for it makes us *certain* that
" this mortal ſhall put on immortality."

Whatever compoſure in the proſpect of diſſolution habits of calm ſtudy and peculiar firmneſs of temperament may produce in ſome minds, yet is it poſſible that any pleaſing or joyful emotions ſhould derive their origin from doubt or diſbelief of the future exiſtence of man? In this the Chriſtian faith is glorioufly triumphant over all others.

We may appeal to any one who attentively peruſes and thoroughly believes the goſpel, whether its doctrines be not the beſt guide, and the greateſt cordial and conſolation of human life. How does every ſerious converſation of a true Chriſtian, every book he writes on moral and religious ſubjects, every pleaſure he enjoys, every affliction he endures, and even the common current of life, the flow of tranquil ſatisfaction that pervades his mind, at eaſe with itſelf, and relying on his heavenly Father's promiſe of better things to come; how do all theſe unite to teſtify the conſtant cheering influence of that " day-ſpring
" from on high which hath viſited the world, to give
" light to them that ſit in darkneſs and in the ſhadow
" of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace."
This leadsus to add:

V. Chriſtianity is new, both in the *kind*, and in the *degree*, of its *evidence*. Had

Had Jeſus been an enthuſiaſt, he could not have refrained from diſtinctly explaining the extent of the novel ſcheme, which he planned for the univerſal benefit of mankind, to ſome, at leaſt, of his friends, ſo that they ſhould have fully comprehended it. Had he been an impoſtor, a clear illuſtration of it to a few would have been neceſſary towards carrying on his deſign. But the moſt intimate friends, the conſtant companions, the apoſtles, of Jeſus, whom he choſe to execute his plan, did not themſelves know the true nature and extent of it till after his death. John xii. 6. Mark ix. 32. Luke ii. 50. xviii. 34. John viii. 27. x. 6. xiv. 25, 26. Luke xxiv. 49. This is unprecedented. It is alſo an evidence that Jeſus was neither an enthuſiaſt nor an impoſtor, and therefore that he was, what he pretended to be, the meſſenger of the Moſt High.

Jeſus of Nazareth is the firſt teacher of religion and morals in the world, who has reſted a deciſive proof of his divine authority upon the fact of his own reſurrection from the dead. When the Jews, upon his driving the money-changers and others out of the temple, ſaid unto him, "What ſign ſheweſt thou, "ſeeing that thou doeſt theſe things?" Jeſus anſwered, "Deſtroy this temple, and in three days I "will raiſe it up. Then ſaid the Jews, forty and ſix "years was this temple in building, and wilt thou "raiſe it up in three days? But he ſpake of the "temple of his body. When, therefore, he was

" riſen from the dead, his *diſciples* remembered that he " had ſaid this unto them, and they believed the ſcrip- " ture, and the word which Jeſus had ſaid." And, while he lay in the ſepulchre, his *enemies* recognized his prediction, that in three days he ſhould riſe again, and accordingly exerted their utmoſt endeavours to prevent the accompliſhment of it. " The day after " the preparation the chief prieſts and phariſees came " together unto Pilate, ſaying, Sir, we remember that " that deceiver ſaid, while he was yet alive, After " three days I will riſe again." And the Apoſtle Paul tells the Corinthians, " If Chriſt be not riſen, " then is our preaching vain, and your faith is alſo " vain."

It is not only new, but a moſt valuable and important novelty, to have the main evidence of ſo intereſting an affair, as that of our own reſurrection, placed upon ſo firm a baſis as that of a ſimple fact, the reality or non-exiſtence of which might be proved by the ſenſes and common underſtandings of the perſons preſent, and a ſatisfactory account of which might eaſily be tranſmitted, to diſtant nations and ſucceeding ages, in a plain narrative.

We may obſerve, further, that there is ſuch a long continued ſeries of prophetical evidence for the divine miſſion of Chriſt, as cannot be equalled reſpecting any other religious and moral inſtructor. To Abraham it was promiſed by God, " In thy ſeed ſhall all " the nations of the earth be bleſſed." The ſame

ſentiment

ſentiment was afterwards more pointedly expreſſed by Jacob, and confirmed by Moſes. The reſt of the Jewiſh prophets likewiſe, through a ſucceſſion of ages, in a clearer and more explicit manner prophe-ſied concerning the Meſſiah. At laſt John, the pre-dicted immediate forerunner of Chriſt, proclaimed that "his kingdom was at hand." Jeſus himſelf then came, "full of grace and truth." To prove his divine authority, he fulfilled the prophecies con-cerning him, worked miracles of mercy to evidence the truth and benign ſpirit of his religion, uttered many important predictions, taught the doctrines of religion and morals with unrivalled excellence both of ſentiment and manner, practiſed what he taught, and at length, falſely accuſed and condemned to be crucified, in his laſt agony he prayed for the forgive-neſs of his murderers, calmly reſigned his ſpirit to his heavenly *father*, and then expired. On the third day after this, as he himſelf predicted, he aroſe again from the dead by the power of his heavenly *father*, appeared to his diſciples at different times, and to 500 brethren at once. Forty days after his reſur-rection, he commiſſioned apoſtles to teach all nations, promiſed them divine power to aid them in their ar-duous undertaking, and then, in their preſence, "aſcended to his *father* and our *father*, to his God "and our God." The effuſion of the ſpirit at the day of Pentecoſt bore the firſt atteſtation to the vera-city of his promiſe; the prophecies which the apoſtles uttered,

uttered, and the miracles they wrought, continued to evidence their divine commiſſion; ſeveral of the apoſtles ſealed their teſtimony with their blood; and the Apoſtle John has left a prophetical hiſtory of the church till the end of the world, to confirm the faith, and animate the hope, of the diſciples of Jeſus, till "he ſhall come again in the glory of his *father*, to "judge the world in righteouſneſs, and to receive "his faithful followers to himſelf." A ſeries of prophecies is a ſeries of miraculous evidence; for there are miracles of knowledge, as well as of power. Wherever a foreſight evidently beyond human ſagacity is manifeſted, there we muſt look to the fountain of wiſdom as the ſource of it.

The Jewiſh religion, indeed, is confirmed to us by a long ſeries of prophecies, and by miraculous preſent appearances. But Moſes, the founder of it, was not foretold by any preceding prophet. And the time will come, before the final diſſolution, when the prophecies concerning the Jews ſhall have received their full completion, and they ſhall ſubmit to Jeſus as their promiſed Meſſiah.

We may add, that no teacher of religion and morals ever made ſo open and candid an appeal, to ſuch various and convincing proofs of his divine authority, as Jeſus did. He appeals to his inſtructions and to his character. He refers to the miracles which God himſelf immediately wrought to atteſt his divine authority, namely, the voice from heaven three

three ſeveral times, his own reſurrection from the dead, and the miſſion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecoſt, who was to abide with his apoſtles as their comforter and guide. He further appeals to the miracles which the *father* enabled both him and his apoſtles to perform. He refers, likewiſe, to the predictions in the Old Teſtament, and of John the Baptiſt, concerning him, and to his own fore-knowledge of future events, particularly of his ſufferings, crucifixion, death, and reſurrection from the grave. He further appeals to the public manner in which he taught, and, finally, to the teſtimony of the apoſtles to his divine commiſſion.

Neither impoſtors nor enthuſiaſts are fond of referring to a variety of evidences in their favour, nor of inviting diſcuſſion. All that Demetrius the ſhrine-maker urged in behalf of the Epheſian goddeſs was, that "the craft was in danger, as well as the temple "and magnificence of Diana." The town-clerk alſo ſays only, "What man is there who knows not that "the Epheſians worſhip the great goddeſs Diana, "and the image which fell down from Jupiter;" and aſſerts, that "theſe things cannot be ſpoken againſt." Du Halde, in his account of the ſect of Fo, relates that, "when Fo, or Foë, the chimerical Chineſe "deity, gave a particular charge to one of his fa-"vourite diſciples, called Moo-kia-ye, he commanded "him, *not* to amuſe himſelf *with bringing proofs* and "tedious arguments to ſupport his doctrine, but

"to

" to put in a plain manner, at the head of his works " which he ſhould publiſh, theſe words, *It is thus* " *that I have learned.*"

But the great author and finiſher of our faith, conſcious that he came to bear witneſs to the truth, ſubmitted a great diverſity of arguments for his divine authority to the fulleſt and moſt impartial examination of mankind. Again, though no proofs in favor of any religion were ever ſo thoroughly ſcrutinized from the beginning, by believers as well as unbelievers, by the captious as well as ſincere enquirers, by the moſt learned, the moſt ſagacious, the moſt knowing and ingenious of mankind, for a continued ſeries of ages, as thoſe to which Jeſus has appealed, yet not a ſingle evidence has been annulled or confuted. Taunts and ſneers, inſinuations and artful cavils, wit and argument, aſſertions, conjectures, partial compariſons, and all the efforts of human ſkill, have been tried to deſtroy the bulwarks of the Chriſtian faith. But, founded as it is on the adamantine rock of truth, it has ſafely withſtood every attack, and bid defiance to every art that has been employed to undermine it. And it will remain till the earth itſelf be diſſolved, and the glorious conſummation of this wiſe and benevolent plan of our heavenly father ſhall pour conviction on the minds of all thoſe who know not God, nor believe in the goſpel of Chriſt.

VI. The *means* that were employed to *publiſh* the goſpel were totally new, and the *ſpeedy* and *extenſive* *progreſs*

progreſs of it, under ſuch circumſtances, were unparalleled.

Learning, ſcience, and civil power, were united to recommend the various ſyſtems of morals, polytheiſm, and idolatrous worſhip, that prevailed in the Pagan world. Socrates, though he was the ſon of a ſtatuary, was well inſtructed in ſcience. He had alſo been a gallant military officer, and an intrepid member of the Athenian ſenate, which of courſe gave him influence, when he retired to be an inſtructor of youth. Confucius was of a noble family, was deſcended from one of the Emperors of China, enjoyed great advantages for improvement in literature and the knowledge of mankind, and was raiſed to diſtinguiſhed honours in the ſtate. He uſed to ſay, "I am not "the inventor of the doctrine I teach. I learned it "from the ancients." Zoroaſter, after having been the ſervant of a Jewiſh prophet, gained the favor and patronage of King Darius Hyſtaſpes, poſſeſſed the ſupreme eccleſiaſtical power in Perſia, and was eminently ſkilled in all the knowledge of the Eaſt, and in the Jewiſh ſcriptures. Moſes was brought up in the houſe of Pharoah's daughter, and was learned in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians. And the prophets were educated in ſchools ſet apart for that purpoſe. But when he of whom all the prophets foretold appeared as the Meſſiah, and "ſpake as never "man ſpake," his townſmen, who knew his family, and how he had been brought up, were aſtoniſhed

at

at the excellence of his inſtructions, and ſaid, " Is " not this the carpenter's ſon? How knoweth this " man letters, having never learned?" The perſons, alſo, whom he choſe to be with him to be eye-witneſſes of what he did, and to hear from his mouth what he taught, were plain men, unlettered, in low circumſtances, and without power or influence. Theſe publiſhed, and teſtified to the world, what they ſaw their maſter perform, and what they heard him ſpeak. Paul, indeed, the moſt active and induſtrious of the apoſtles, as far as our records go, in ſpreading the religion of Jeſus, was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. He was not a companion of Chriſt during his miniſtry. He was a zealous perſecutor of the Chriſtians for ſome time after the aſcenſion of Jeſus. Then, being converted in an extraordinary manner, he became a zealous preacher of chriſtianity. But he expreſsly declares, reſpecting himſelf, that human talents and abilities were not the means which he employed in the firſt publication of the goſpel. In his addreſs to king Agrippa, he ſays, " Having obtained " help of God, I continue unto this day, witneſſing " both to ſmall and great, ſaying no other things " than thoſe which the prophets and Moſes did ſay " ſhould come, that Chriſt ſhould ſuffer, and that " he ſhould be the firſt that ſhould riſe from the " dead, and ſhould ſhew light unto the people, and " to the gentiles." To the Corinthians, alſo he declares, " I came to you, not with excellency of ſpeech

" or

" or of wiſdom declaring unto you the teſtimony of " God, but in demonſtration of the ſpirit and of pow- " er, that your faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom " of men, but in the power of God."

The wiſe, the learned, and the powerful, uſually plan and direct any great revolution, in either civil or religious affairs. But, at the beginning, " not " many wiſe men, not many mighty, not many noble, " were called to the Chriſtian faith." The goſpel was preached by the poor, it was addreſſed to the poor (which was then a rare circumſtance) as well as to the rich, and it was firſt embraced by the lower and middle claſſes of men. Then prieſts, philoſophers, and rulers, followed the general ſentiment. This was the firſt inſtance in which a new religion was thus introduced into the world.

The publication of the goſpel evidently originated with men unequal, of themſelves, to the taſk which they had undertaken. The Apoſtle Paul tells the Corinthians, " God hath choſen the fooliſh men in " the account of the world, to confound the wiſe, " the weak men of the world to confound the " mighty, the mean and contemptible men of the " world, and thoſe that are of no account, to bring " to nought thoſe that are." Did ever human ſagacity think of employing ſuch inſtruments for ſuch a purpoſe? What means could be leſs adapted, in the uſual courſe of things, to change the religion and reform the vices of the world?

Yet,

Yet, without learning, without power, without wealth or influence, every where deſpiſed by philoſophers, diſcouraged and perſecuted by thoſe who were in authority, in peaceable oppoſition to the inveterate prejudices, vicious habits, cuſtoms, pleaſures, reputation, and worldly intereſt, of both Jews and Gentiles, (which comprehended all mankind,) and holding out nothing in this life to their followers but the loſs of outward comforts, ignominy, martyrdom, and death, under theſe circumſtances, the ſon of a carpenter, a few fiſhermen and mechanics, a publican, and one diſciple of Gamaliel who renounces all means of making converts but the power of God only, theſe perſons, in leſs than 40 years, ſpread a new religion through all parts of the Roman Empire, and amongſt the Parthians and Indians. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, the unlearned and the wiſe, barbarous and poliſhed nations, became alike the diſciples of a crucified Maſter. What poſſible ſtronger proof could have been afforded, that the author of this ſcheme muſt have been more than human? The ſun of righteouſneſs, at firſt obſcured by "the darkneſs that had covered the earth, and the "groſs darkneſs in which the people were involved," ſoon diſpelled the clouds of ignorance, ſuperſtition and vice, and "the Gentiles came to its light, and "kings to the brightneſs of its riſing." This glorious luminary has through ſucceſſive ages enlightened the globe in various degrees, as the ſituation

and

and circumſtances of different parts of it were adapted to receive its rays. Its luſtre ſtill gradually increaſes, and the time will come when the ſplendor of the goſpel ſhall baniſh gloom and deluſion from the world, and "all the ends of the earth ſhall ſee the ſalva-"tion of God."

VII. The *effects* which chriſtianity produced upon the *religion* and *manners* of mankind were ſingular and aſtoniſhing. No other inſtitution, of any kind, has ever ſo rapidly brought about a general change in theſe, as the goſpel has done.

Chriſtianity, indeed, is a religion of the heart, it profeſſes to regulate particularly the inward thoughts, diſpoſitions, and motives of action, as well as the converſation and the conduct. Its primary and chief effects, therefore, are internal, and, on this account, not the ſubject of common obſervation. The principles on which the character is formed and maintained, are *fully* known only to God, and a man's own conſcience; though uſually it is, "from the "abundance of the heart, that the mouth ſpeaketh," and the actions of the life proceed.

A few facts, teſtified both by the friends and the enemies of Chriſt, will prove the early and extenſive influence which the goſpel had upon the lives and manners of men.

Let us firſt attend to the moral and religious conduct of the primitive diſciples of Jeſus. Their remarkable

markable piety and virtue are well known, and proved from the moſt undoubted authorities. In the epiſtles of the New Teſtament, there are many paſſages which ſhew the wonderful reformation that was wrought by the goſpel upon the hearts and lives of its profeſſors. We ſhall produce one inſtance only. The Apoſtle Paul, in his firſt letter to the Corinthians, after mentioning ſeveral vices which exclude from the kingdom of heaven when they pervade the character, ſubjoins, " And ſuch were ſome of ye, " but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are " juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by " the ſpirit of our God." The fathers alſo, in their apologies for the Chriſtians, which were preſented to Heathen emperors, inſiſted on the virtue and unblameableneſs of their lives, as well-known facts. Pagans of diſtinguiſhed rank, power, and learning, gave the ſame teſtimony.

Pliny, a heathen philoſopher and augur, who had been a conſul, and was afterwards governor of Bythinia, in one of his official letters to the Emperor Trajan, not above 40 years after the death of the Apoſtle Paul, writes, " That ſeveral who had been " Chriſtians, but then reviled Chriſt, affirmed that the " whole of their fault or error lay in this, that they " were wont to meet together on a ſtated day before " it was light, and ſing among themſelves alternately " a hymn to Chriſt as a god, and bind themſelves " by an oath—not to the commiſſion of any wicked-

" neſs

" neſs, but—not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or " adultery, never to falſify their word, nor to deny " a pledge committed to them when called upon to " return it. After receiving this account, I judged " it the more neceſſary to examine, and that by tor- " ture, two maid-ſervants who were called miniſters. " But I have diſcovered nothing beſides a bad and " exceſſive ſuperſtition." And the emperor Julian, who was once a Chriſtian, but afterwards relapſed into heathen idolatry, in his letter to Arſacius, high-prieſt of Galatia, recommends the example of the Chriſtians, reſpecting charity to their poor, to the imitation of the heathens. He writes thus: " You " are to erect hoſpitals in every city, that ſtrangers " alſo may ſhare in our humanity, and not only " thoſe of our own religion, but others likewiſe if " they are neceſſitous. For it is a ſhame, when there " are no beggars amongſt the Jews, and the impious " Galileans relieve not only their own people, but " ours alſo, that our poor ſhould be neglected by us, " and be left helpleſs and deſtitute." Such are the unexceptionable teſtimonies to the remarkable virtue of the primitive diſciples of Jeſus. And from the ſame fountain of wiſdom and goodneſs from which their characters were formed, millions of the human race have ſince derived greater degrees of piety, virtue, and happineſs, in this world, and more animating proſpects of future felicity, than any other ſource ever ſupplied.

We

We may add, that the goſpel has been the means of aboliſhing ſeveral cruel and inhuman practices. It has put an end to the barbarous and vicious rites of Pagan religion, and to the ſhocking cuſtom of expoſing infants. It has annulled thoſe horrid gladiatorial ſhews, in which perſons fought with and killed each other for the public amuſement. To ſuch a degree did a deſire of this entertainment increaſe, that we are told it ſometimes coſt Europe 20 or 30 thouſand lives in a ſingle month. "The humane "ſpirit of the Chriſtian religion," ſays Dr. Robertſon, "contributed more than any other circumſtance "to introduce the practice of manumiſſion of ſlaves." It has put an end to polygamy, and has diminiſhed the almoſt boundleſs liberty of divorcing. The influence of chriſtianity on the political, moral, religious, and domeſtic ſtate of the world, is a ſubject of large compaſs. To what we have already ſaid, we ſhall only ſubjoin a reflection or two upon the effects which it has had in improving the laws and regulations of civil ſocieties.

"In the fifth century," ſays Mr. Gibbon, "chriſ-"tianity was embraced by almoſt all the barbarians "who eſtabliſhed their kingdoms on the ruins of "the Weſtern empire. It introduced an important "change in their moral and political condition. In "the moſt corrupt ſtate of chriſtianity, the barbarians "might learn juſtice from the law, and mercy from "the goſpel. It was the intereſt of the biſhops, as

"well

" well as their duty, to mollify by peaceful counſels " the fierce ſpirit of the barbarians. And the union " of Chriſtians gradually produced the ſimilar man- " ners, and common juriſprudence, which have diſ- " tinguiſhed from the reſt of mankind the indepen- " dent and even the hoſtile nations of Europe." Monteſquieu, alſo, has the following obſervation on the benign effects of chriſtianity: " Let us ſet before " our eyes, on the one hand, the continual maſſacres " of the kings and generals of the Greeks and Ro- " mans, and on the other, the deſtruction of people " and cities, by thoſe famous conquerors Timur Beg, " and Jenghiz Khan, who ravaged Aſia, and we " ſhall ſee that we owe to chriſtianity, in government, " a certain political law, and in war, a certain law of " nations; benefits which human nature can never " ſufficiently acknowledge. It is owing to this law " of nations that, amongſt us, victory leaves theſe " great advantages to the conquered, life, liberty, " laws, wealth, and always religion, when the con- " queror is not blind to his own intereſt."

That all the effects which we have mentioned ought to be attributed to the religion of Jeſus as their cauſe, appears from this, that it is a cauſe, which has a natural tendency to produce ſuch benign conſequences, which actually exiſted in the places where theſe effects have been obſerved, and which diſplayed them after ſcience, commerce, government, and poliſhed manners, had proved themſelves inadequate to

the production of ſuch valuable bleſſings. The hiſtory of Greece and Rome, in their moſt diſtinguiſhed periods of knowledge and refinement, and of Carthage, in the greateſt ſplendour of her wealth and commerce, bear ample teſtimony to this.

Can we forbear then to join in the exclamation of Monteſquieu, "How admirable the religion which, "while it ſeems only to have in view the felicity of "the other life, conſtitutes the happineſs of this!"

There is one ſingular and wonderful effect of the publication of the goſpel that deſerves our particular attention, an effect which has been notorious to the world at large for more than 17 ſucceſſive centuries, and we may defy the utmoſt ſagacity of man to account for it, if Jeſus was an impoſtor, and his apoſtles partners in the cheat. The fact to which I allude is, the exiſtence of chriſtianity as a general religion in the moſt free and enlightened parts of the world. This fact is ſo extraordinary, when we conſider the nature and author of this religion, the ſtate of the world before it appeared, the manner in which, and the perſons by whom, it was publiſhed, that it requires an extraordinary cauſe. It is unphiloſophical indeed to ſeek for a new cauſe of any event, if the exiſting ones are adequate to the production of it. The only way in which we can judge of the operation of cauſes, and their capability of producing effects, is, by attending to their nature, and to what they have actually produced.

Spirituality

Spirituality, and freedom from burdenſome rites; which are eſſential to the religion of Jeſus, could never derive their origin from ſuch a ſyſtem as the Moſaic, the greateſt part of which conſiſted of ceremonial laws. Nor could a complete ſcheme of morals take its riſe ſimply from one that was defective. From the imperfect ideas which heathen philoſophers entertained of virtue, and the abſurd, cruel, and impure rites of Pagan worſhip, a religion, ſo pure, ſo perfect, and benevolent, as the Chriſtian, could never have ſprung. As is the fountain, ſo will be the ſtream. And to an effect we cannot reaſonably aſcribe a degree of perfection which does not ſubſiſt in the cauſe. Accordingly we find that ſuch a complete ſcheme of religion and morals as the goſpel contains, was never prevalent in any part of the world, during the 4000 years that had elapſed from the creation to the coming of Chriſt. This is ſurely a length of time ſufficient to prove, whether the cauſes which exiſted before the coming of Chriſt were adequate or inadequate to produce the effect for which we are endeavoring to account. As they *did* not produce it, the fair concluſion is, that they *could* not. And the very nature of the cauſes proves the ſame.

But if theſe cauſes were inadequate to the effect, it may be fairly aſked, how then could the uninſtructed ſon of a carpenter, and twelve illiterate aſſociates, invent, and actually pen, a ſcheme ef religion

and morals more clear and conſiſtent, more pure and perfect, more cogent and perſuaſive, than Moſes, the prophets, or heathen philoſophers of the firſt rank, ever formed even an idea of, and which has been an object of the higheſt admiration to the moſt uſeful, ſagacious, and worthy characters that ever adorned our common nature? How could the Evangeliſts comprehend, and eſpecially how could they, in a ſeries of diſcourſes, actions, and events, really exhibit to us a life of innocence and complete piety and virtue in which meekneſs and fortitude, dignity and condeſcenſion, and a variety of the ſeemingly oppoſite qualities of religion and goodneſs, are gracefully united and combined in one well-proportioned whole?

Had Jeſus and his apoſtles even formed ſuch a religion and ſuch a character, by what means could they have engaged Jews to renounce a divinely authorized inſtitution, the national partiality which they felt as deſcendants of Abraham, their favourite hope of a temporal Meſſiah and deliverer from the Roman yoke, and to become the willing diſciples of a crucified Maſter? How could they have perſuaded the learned and the wiſe in heathen nations, to reſign their philoſophic pride, and humbly adopt the invention of perſons for whom they entertained an utter contempt? When a Roman Emperor in the plenitude of power demanded religious worſhip to his own ſtatue in common with the other gods, and the Empire was obſequious to his mandate, how could a

few

few deſpiſed men, unaided by learning, authority, or artifice, engage a depraved and ſuperſtitious multitude to refuſe the homage, when by that they reſigned their lives?

Amongſt both Jews and Gentiles, how could Chriſt and his diſciples have ſpread their religion in oppoſition to the paſſions, pleaſures, intereſt, and powers of the world?

Theſe cauſes, ſimply conſidered, are ſtill inadequate to the effect. Nor will any merely human aſſignable cauſes, that actually exiſted at the time when Chriſt and his apoſtles appeared on earth, fairly explain to us, how the Chriſtian ſyſtem was formed and ſpread through the world, and how it was handed down through ſucceſſive ages, till it came to be the religion of the preſent day.

Neceſſity then compels us to look for ſome other cauſes. Theſe are with great candour and ſimplicity narrated to us in the New Teſtament. No one will deny, if the facts there related to us were true, that they were adequate to the production of the effect. The well-atteſted hiſtory of the goſpel aſſures us that they did exiſt. Though Chriſtians were from the beginning perſecuted and deſpiſed, yet the facts upon which they reſted their faith remained for centuries uncontroverted. That many of theſe facts were miraculous accords with the nature of the hiſtory, as being an account of a revelation from God, who would of courſe furniſh his meſſengers with undoubted

doubted proofs of their divine commiſſion. But extraordinary as the facts are which are related in the goſpel to have taken place, they are far leſs extraordinary, if the hiſtory be not true, than the ſingle fact which comes within our own notice, namely, the exiſtence of chriſtianity at the preſent time.

If by any it be "thought a thing incredible that "God ſhould raiſe the dead," (which is the main fact on which the evidence of chriſtianity depends,) let them fairly conſider, what an innumerable multitude of much more incredible facts they muſt believe who reject that of the reſurrection of Jeſus. They muſt believe, that Chriſt and his apoſtles, without any natural probable means, formed a purer and more perfect religion than Moſes and the prophets publiſhed, or than the wiſeſt Pagan philoſophers ever thought of; and that without either force or art, in oppoſition to all poſſible human difficulties and diſcouragements, they cauſed this to become the religion of the world, (which of all things was the moſt difficult to have accompliſhed,) engaged Jews to baniſh their ritual ſervice, which was of divine appointment, and heathens to renounce their idol deities and their vicious worſhip, and worked an actual reformation in the minds and manners of men from the groſſeſt moral depravity to the pureſt virtue. Theſe are facts which friends and enemies agree in teſtifying. Now, if the fact of the miracles and reſurrection of Jeſus be different from general experience

ence reſpecting the natural world, how much more different would the converſion of Jews and Gentiles, by the natural means that were employed, be from the laws of belief, and of the moral world. The reſurrection of Chriſt, and his miracles, imply no contradiction to almighty power. But ſuch are the contradictions maintained on the ſuppoſition of their falſity, that the moſt wonderful events in the whole hiſtory of the world are believed to have taken place without any adequate cauſe. And upon the ſame principle that the memoirs of Chriſt are rejected, we muſt have no faith in the evidence of teſtimony, no confidence in commerce, no reliance upon any thing we hear, we could derive no profit or improvement from the knowledge and experience of others, and human life would be a ſcene of univerſal anarchy and confuſion.

The enemies of Jeſus, who unjuſtly accuſed him, and cauſed him to be publicly crucified, wanted neither power nor inveterate malice to have urged them to prove that there was a deception in the caſe of his reſurrection, if it had been a mere falſity. They actually took the greateſt precautions to prevent it, by obtaining from Pilate ſuch a guard of ſoldiers to ſecure the body from being ſtolen, as they themſelves judged to be ſufficient for this purpoſe. It being alſo the time of the paſſover, when there was a full moon, and when Jeruſalem was crouded with people from all parts of Judea and from other nations, ſeveral of whom

whom were probably walking about all night, (and common curioſity would have led them to ſeek for the place where this perſon who claimed to be the Meſſiah was buried, eſpecially as he declared that he ſhould riſe again from the dead,) the guard could not have ſlept without having been detected. If any of them had ſlept, it would have been at the hazard of their lives. That all of them ſhould have been aſleep together, upon a guard of only three or four hours continuance, or that the timid diſciples, who fled from Jeſus when he was apprehended, ſhould be bold enough to hazard their lives, by attempting to ſteal the body when all hopes about their temporal Meſſiah were vaniſhed, and they had no worldly end to ſerve, is improbable in the higheſt degree. Again, if the guard had been all aſleep together, they could not have atteſted that during their ſleep the body was ſtolen, becauſe they could not ſee. But what puts it beyond a doubt, that it was not thus conveyed away is this, that the body of Chriſt was never produced by his enemies, which it might eaſily have been if it had been ſtolen. Was it poſſible for the diſciples of Jeſus to have removed the body through a guard of Roman ſoldiers, at the time of the paſſover, to any place where the Jewiſh prieſts and phariſees with all their ſpies and informers, and the Roman governor with his army, could not have brought it into public view again?

It further merits our particular notice, that the apoſtles and others, who were eye-witneſſes of the reſurrection of Chriſt, and of the miracles which he wrought, atteſted the truth of them in a moſt ſingular and unprecedented manner. There have been inſtances of perſons dying in ſupport of falſe *opinions* which they held to be true; but who ever gave up his life to atteſt the truth of a *fact* which he knew or believed to be falſe, or of which he was even doubtful? Thoſe who were preſent when Chriſt pretended to work miracles, and who ſaw him alive again after he had been nailed upon the croſs, had been pierced with a Roman ſpear, and the centurion had declared him dead, and he had lain in the ſepulchre bound in grave-clothes for ſo long a time, muſt have been competent judges whether the miracles and reſurrection of Jeſus were real or pretended facts. Impoſtors can have no other motives than worldly ones. There were no temptations of this ſort, however, to allure the firſt followers of Jeſus. Nor does the hiſtory of the apoſtles betray the leaſt mark of fraud and deceit. Even enthuthiaſts have never proceeded to ſuch a degree of inſanity, as to reſign life itſelf in atteſtation of what they knew to be falſe, which muſt indeed be impoſture. Several of the apoſtles, and multitudes of the primitive diſciples of Chriſt, however, did voluntarily ſuffer death itſelf in its moſt horrid forms, to witneſs the truth of the goſpel, and the reſurrection of Jeſus. If they witneſſed

a lie,

a lie, theſe facts are more contrary to general experience than even the miracles which they atteſted.

But if the hiſtory be true, if Jeſus be the Meſſiah, and God raiſed him from the dead, it accords with preſent facts, and with that ſeries of well-eſtabliſhed teſtimony, by which we are aſſured that chriſtianity has ſubſiſted as a general religion for upwards of ſeventeen hundred years.

In all matters of probable argument, a rational mind is ſwayed by the preponderance of proof. On which ſide, then, in the preſent caſe, does the balance lean? Whatever fact is poſſible, is the proper ſubject of evidence and teſtimony. Almighty God ſurely has power to interrupt that courſe of nature which he himſelf eſtabliſhed. Miracles therefore are proper ſubjects of teſtimony. They require indeed ſtronger proof than common facts. But when there are facts under our own obſervation more wonderful than the miracles which are credibly atteſted to have produced them, and which cannot be accounted for by any merely natural cauſes; when there is abundantly various and ſtrong direct external evidence from other extraordinary facts, and from teſtimony, that ſupernatural events, which would eaſily account for them, did exiſt before and at the firſt appearance of theſe facts; when there is every internal and external mark of veracity in the hiſtory of theſe events; when theſe events, though ſtrictly ſcrutinized from the beginning, were univerſally allowed

lowed for ſome centuries to have really taken place, and have never ſince been diſproved; and when, by rejecting ſuch evidence, we are obliged to admit abſurdities without number, and that the moſt aſtoniſhing facts exiſt without any adequate aſſignable cauſe; in ſuch a caſe is it not far more incredible and aſtoniſhing, and much more contrary to human experience, that ſuch concurrent proof ſhould be falſe, than that it ſhould be true? And ſuch is the proof we have that the *goſpel* is a narrative of facts. "Chriſt "then is riſen, and become the firſt-fruits of them "that ſlept. Becauſe he lives, we ſhall live alſo."

Thus have we pointed out ſeveral novelties in the Chriſtian religion. We have ſhewn that each of them is a characteriſtic excellence, and that every excellence is of ſuch a nature and degree as to afford a ſeparate argument for the divine authority of Jeſus. If the union of more than human wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, in every mineral, plant, and animal, proclaims their creator to be the Moſt High, are we not compelled to deduce the ſame concluſion from the ſame tranſcendent attributes diſplayed in the goſpel?

We may further aſk, what is there that we can reaſonably ſuppoſe would accompany a revelation from heaven, that does not centre in the religion of Chriſt? If we look for ſomething new, we find the moſt valuable novelty; if for excellence, we ſee it far ſurpaſſing the higheſt notions which mortals ever before entertained of perfection itſelf; if for evidence

that

that God is its author, we behold it ſo ſtrong, and ſo various, as to accord with our ideas of the productions of Deity.

What an accumulation of proof then muſt ariſe from viewing all theſe properties united in the ſame inſtitution! For the diſtinct atteſtations that ariſe, from the originality and excellence of the religion and character of Jeſus, from the number and validity of its proofs, from the means by which it was publiſhed, joined with the rapidity and extent of its progreſs, and from its effects, by being all added together, not only *increaſe* the evidence, but *multiply* it, and ſo much as to afford an irreſiſtible argument, that the ſcheme of chriſtianity was of divine origin. Will it be poſſible to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood, if theſe are not deciſive marks?

The good and ſagacious Biſhop Butler has left the following amongſt many other valuable obſervations relating to the evidences of the goſpel: "The "truth of our religion, like the truth of common "matters, is to be judged of by all the evidence taken "together. And unleſs the whole ſeries of things "to be alledged in this argument, and every particu-"lar thing in it, can reaſonably be ſuppoſed to have "been by accident, (for here the ſtreſs of the argu-"ment for chriſtianity lies,) then is the truth of it "proved: in like manner as if, in any common caſe, "numerous events acknowledged were to be alledged "in proof of another event diſputed; the truth of

"the

" the diſputed event would be proved, not only if " any one of the acknowledged ones did of itſelf " clearly imply it, but, though no one of them ſingly " did ſo, if the whole of the acknowledged events " taken together, could not in reaſon be ſuppoſed to " have happened unleſs the diſputed one were true."

" It is obvious, how much advantage the nature " of this evidence gives to thoſe perſons who attack " chriſtianity, eſpecially in converſation. For it is " eaſy to ſhew, in a ſhort and lively manner, that " ſuch and ſuch things are liable to objection, that " this and another thing is of little weight in itſelf; " but impoſſible in like manner to ſhew the united " force of the whole argument in one view."

" The poſitive evidence for chriſtianity, direct and " collateral taken together as forming one general " argument, ſhews that this evidence is ſuch as, from " the nature of it, cannot be deſtroyed, though it " ſhould be leſſened."

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 6, l. 18, for *character*, read *original*.
13, l. 7, for *has*, read *have*.
38, l. 17, for *Juda*, read *Judah*.
45, l. 10, for *is*, read *are*.

Publiſhed by the ſame Author.

An ESSAY to ſhew that CHRISTIANITY is beſt conveyed in the Hiſtoric Form. Price 2s.

CHRISTIAN ARGUMENTS for SOCIAL and PUBLIC WORSHIP, a Sermon. Price 6d.

An ESSAY on Religious FASTING and HUMILIATION. Price 6d.

An ABSTRACT of the GOSPEL HISTORY in Scripture Language, for the uſe of Sunday Schools. Price 2d.

THOUGHTS on the Novelty, the Excellence, and the Evidence of Chriſtianity. Price 1s.